Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

February 1967
60c

OUR MAN
N PEKING
by
Hayden Howard

RETURN MATCH
by
Philip K. Dick

THEY HILARIATED
WHEN I
HYPERSPACED
TO EARTH
by
Richard Wilson

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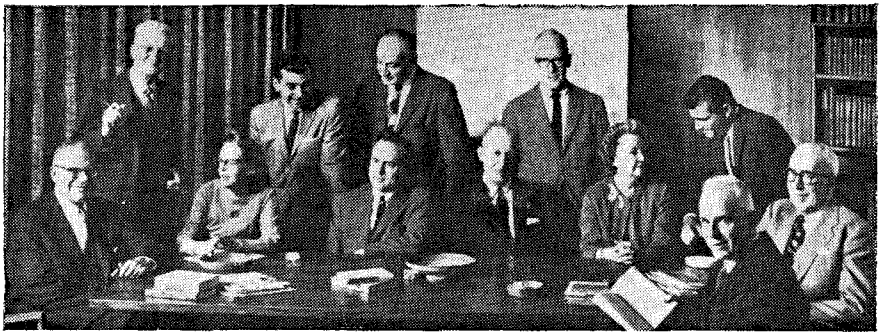

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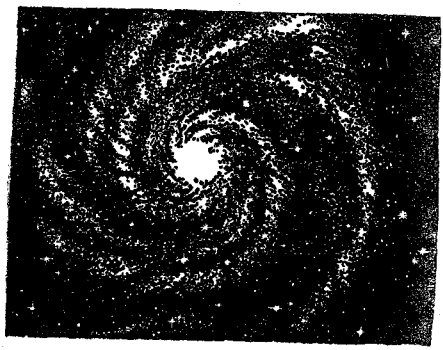

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CONTENTS

NOVELETTES

OUR MAN IN PEKING 8
by Hayden Howard

THEY HILARIATED WHEN I HYPERSPACED FOR EARTH 89
by Richard Wilson

SERIAL

THE PALACE OF LOVE 137
by Jack Vance

SHORT STORIES

RETURN MATCH 59
by Philip K. Dick

THE LAST FILIBUSTER 84
by Wallace West

THE TROJAN BOMBARDMENT 109
by Christopher Anvil

THUS WE FRUSTRATE CHARLEMAGNE ..126
by R. A. Lafferty

NON-FACT ARTICLE

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NULLITRON ..122
by Thomas M. Disch & John Sladek

SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

FOR YOUR INFORMATION 75
by Willy Ley

DEPARTMENTS

EDITORIAL 4
by Frederik Pohl

GALAXY BOOKSHELF 188
by Algis Budrys

Cover by GAUGHAN from OUR MAN IN PEKING

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More About Being Bad

At the World Science Fiction Convention for 1966, held in Cleveland, Ohio, in September, the producers of a new science-fiction television show called *Star Trek* appeared, bearing pilot films, samples of costumes, a brace of writers and their own good selves. They were greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm from the fans and well they should have been, because a power of money had gone into some handsome sets, and a power of talent had been invested in preparing the scripts. On the strength of the sample displayed in Cleveland, and knowledge that such writers as Theodore Sturgeon, Robert Bloch, Harlan Ellison and others were writing stories for the show, the Cleveland Convention voted it a special plaque for excellence.

Then the regular TV season rolled around, and the real *Star Trek* shows (not the pilots; TV people like to play a little game with pilots, which seldom if ever are truly representative of the real thing, so it was to be expected that the actual product

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would be shoddier, cheaper and duller) hit the air, and . . . good heavens, what unorthodoxy! The regular shows were just as good as the pilots! It looked as though there were finally going to be a regular science-fiction series on television that we wouldn't have to explain away as a cheap imitation of the real thing; something some of us might turn to for *enjoyment*.

Enjoy it while you can, fellows. As of yesterday the word was out: *Star Trek* will be off the air shortly after you read this. It just didn't make it in the ratings.

Once again the high priests of TV programming having saved us from the danger of viewing anything not instantly comprehensible by a dull pre-schooler.

The reason is the old familiar one: At the time-slot when *Star Trek* was presented for viewing, the other shows had a larger share of the audience.

Now, it is a fact — not unknown to TV executives — that the way to build up your share of the audience is to appeal to the most immature and least well educated groups in the country, because there are more of them, *Star Trek* made the mistake of appealing to a comparatively literate group: that is, ten-year-olds would probably like it, but six-year-olds would not.

Please understand us: *Star Trek* was a fun show, worth encouraging, but not necessarily the best show ever produced. Science fiction is capable of far more challenge and drama than even *Star Trek* ever dreamed of using. We wouldn't mind if it were being cancelled for something better; but all experience indicates that there is at least a .9 probability that it will be cancelled for something worse.

And so the TV wise men have won another victory in their ceaseless battle to stamp out thought in the American mind. . . .

Unless, of course, there's a last-minute reprieve. If enough people wrote letters to the National Broadcasting Company, or the local stations carrying *Star Trek*, or even to the sponsors, it *might* get them to give this promising show a chance to show what it can do.

But they probably won't. They've got other things on their minds — such as trying to figure out why the biggest rating smash success in recent months was a ten-year-old movie.

— THE EDITOR

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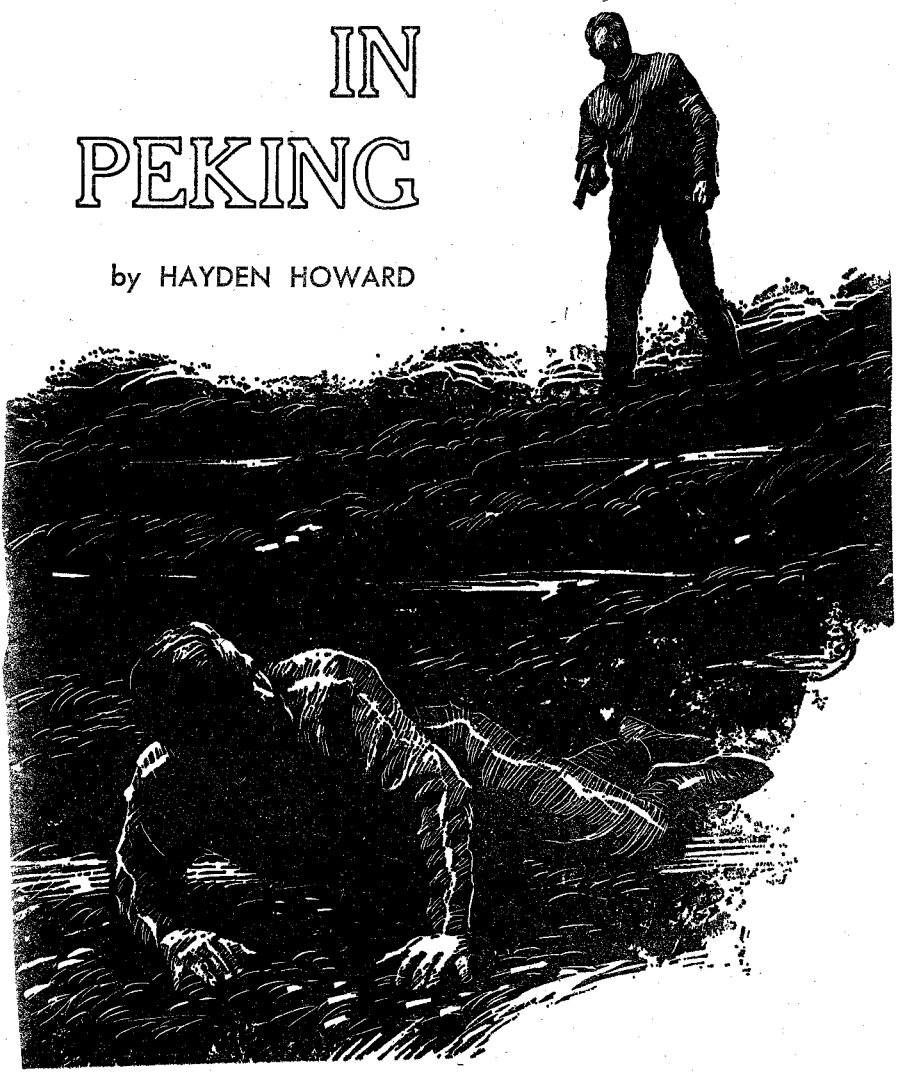
OUR MAN IN PEKING

by HAYDEN HOWARD



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Illustrated by GAUGHAN

He was dropped into Red China on a mission he didn't know — with his life a forfeit if he failed!

I

Hunted by the F.B.I. as a convicted mass murderer and concealed by the Central Intelligence Agency for some damnable purpose, Dr. Joe West plodded across the dark runway. His footsteps clumped toward the silhouette of the aircraft.

His legs felt impossibly heavy. Swollen. But he thought his legs were as thin as when he was an undernourished scholarship student at Harvard Med School.

Imaginary heavy legs? Dr. Joe

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West's mouth split in a confused grin. Psychosomatic elephantiasis? What had the C.I.A. given him?

His face was prison-thin as he plodded toward the aircraft. Staring at the cavernous air intakes under the variable sweep wings, Dr. West recognized the bomber as the last of the air breathers.

Take-off is rocket assisted, too many G's for my circulatory system, he thought dully.

Probably when 2,500 miles per hour or some godawful starting speed was attained, the bomber's ramjets would become operative, and it would flash like a torch through the night. Too fast!

The exertion of walking made him gasp. His heartbeats faltered. At his side his C.I.A. bodyguard urged him on, and the distance to the bomber became excrutiating.

Imaginary heavy legs? *Imaginary* was what one of the excitedly smiling faces in the Harvard Circle had assured him. But in another room in the basement of C.I.A. headquarters, another doctor had reassured him that any slight swelling of his legs was merely a mild side effect of a mild sedative. Contradictory liars! Had they saved him or traded him off?

His legs dragged like anchors as the Air Force ground crew boosted Dr. West up the steel ladder toward the belly of the intruder bomber. In his bemused condition, the tiny orifices pitting the stainless steel skin of the bomber looked like pores. This damned airplane was designed to fly too low, too fast! Did the pores exude sweat to protect its fuselage from the meteoric blaze of air friction? Several of these SCRAMjets had crashed.

I don't want to burn, he thought, almost panicking as they shoved him up into a confining metal tunnel in the aircraft. As he crawled, the glittering close walls hummed against his eardrums and clinked and echoed. Someone was crawling close behind him.

His legs dragging, Dr. West crawled with the strength of his arms and shoulders. His damned legs felt twenty pounds overweight. His muscles shivered. His eyes blinked. His mouth twisted.

Mild sedative? Like heck! He felt as disoriented as if he'd undergone narcohypnosis.

His straining arms pulled him into the cramped electronic counter-measures capsule of the bomber. Unexpectedly his head bumped the low ceiling, and his eyes widened with claustrophobia. The angry world closed on him like a fist. He tried to turn.

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Not enough room for two men in here!

But a nameless Major was struggling in beside him. Massive and radiating heat, the Major grunted. The pressure door clunked shut, sealing them in. Like twins in a womb they squirmed and politely elbowed each other. Dr. West realized they were seated facing backward toward the tail. Against him, the Major's shoulder twisted; and the Major's blue eyes loomed so close, they blurred.

"Let me fix your crash — I mean — safety harness." The Major's laugh was high pitched for such a huge man.

"Here's your crash helmet, you C.I.A. bum! They — " A metallic shriek exploded. Lurching forward, the bomber howled along the runway, hurled itself.

Facing backward, Dr. Joe West felt his eyeballs bulge as acceleration dragged the nylon straps into his chest. Gawking down at the one tiny heat-insulated viewplate between his boots, he glimpsed discolored clouds. The dark mountains of the California coastline were backlighted by the sunrise. Incongruously, obscenely, the sunrise sank into the mountains.

Dr. West realized the bomber had activated its ramjets. It was out-speeding the turning Earth. The dawn drowned. The darkening Pacific Ocean glittered as this lone bomber hurried to overtake the night. Only in darkness could its cargo survive.

The Air Force Major squirmed. "Hope you — I mean — Central Intelligence — you spooks can't just send us off and kill us — without telling us the mission?" The Major's laughter rose like the safety valving of a steam boiler. "The generals shook our hands too much. The brass didn't level with us at the briefing."

"I wasn't at the briefing," Dr. West muttered.

"Why don't you C.I.A. spooks use your own black planes?" the Major laughed explosively. "The way your Deputy Director is buddying around with the President, your Central Intelligence already owns more manned aircraft that the Air Force. So send one of your own black clunkers. This SCRAMjet bomber cost fifty million bucks, and we got damn few of them."

Dr. West didn't know what to answer. His head hurt.

"That was a controlled-environment tank they hoisted into our bomb bay," the Major's voice persisted. "Too heavy. Hell of a long take-off run. Heavy spray tank. Too heavy. So tell me we're going to spray crops."

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The Major shovelled sarcasm. "I mean — the Air Force is not officially at war, you know. I can't speak for the C.I.A. Have your spooks got Presidential approval for this mission? Does *he* know what's in the spray tank?"

"He may. I don't," the Major laughed, squirming, trying to readjust the leather holster on his hip.

Dr. West contorted his body, trying to give the Major elbow room. The Major was showing too explosive a personality, and it was difficult to estimate how he would react if he recognized Dr. West. At least the Major was not piloting the bomber. Dr. West wet his dry lips.

The aircraft's flight steadied. "Autopilot's switched to astro-inertial guidance," the Major said. "Up front Colonel Neller can take his nap. But I got a personal reason for finding out what's in the spray tank."

Dr. West wished the Major would shut up!

Speechless, Dr. West shook his head. His eardrums were killing him. Strapped to his side as closely as a Siamese twin, the Major eyeballed him. "You feel okay?"

Dr. West blinked at the Major's enormously close face. Plainly the Major had not recognized him from the T.V. news, and Dr. West tried to relax. Sometimes when people recognized Dr. West, they tried to kill him.

"The Colonel up there in the control module and you and me, all three in the hot seat," the Major persisted. "We'll fry together, so what's in the spray tank?"

Dr. Joe West furrowed his brow. Clumsily, he tried to scratch his armpit without elbowing the Major. Within his nylon flying suit Dr. West's body was perspiring in the padded cotton rags of a Chinese commune worker, deceased. He couldn't remember if he had been told what was in the spray tank.

Something alive was crawling up his ribs. Hungrily, it bit. Dr. West's face lighted in his pained grin. Evidently for authenticity the Central Intelligence Agency had salted his rags with genuine Chinese Communist fleas.

Another bite! Grinning like a befuddled skeleton, Dr. West imagined when his last drop of blood had been drunk, the fleas would arise in unison and shout: "Paper Tiger!" Then in glorious self-defense and in order to preserve international peace, the fleas would infiltrate the Major.

But the Major would not be another Burma, or Pakistan, The Major's profile, twelve inches from the Doctor's eyes, appeared

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massive and forbidding. His teeth were grinding with tension. The Major would not negotiate with fleas. Or men.

The Major's thick forefinger poked the black box on the Doctor's lap. "That's wired to the spray tank. Hey, this dial is at 98.6 degrees! Is that Fahrenheit? That's the temperature of the human body. What has the C.I.A. got us carrying?

"How should I know," Dr. West's mouth answered as if it had been trained. "I'm only a biotechnician who twists the dials and gets shot." But he knew he was a medical doctor! "I'm not even C.I.A." That was true. Even his mouth wanted to disassociate him from the C.I.A. "I wasn't even at the flight briefing."

"All they showed us was a turning point at the end of our fuel range." The Major opened his hand, then flattened it like a wing and thrust! "Target a couple of hundred miles inland on the deck — minimum altitude. The Chicomms are more apt to knock us down with a tree or a hut roof or a radio tower than with A.A. missiles," the Major laughed, his forehead beaded with sweat. "I need to know what's in the spray tank and to know it now."

He unzipped the front of his flying suit.

Dr. West's throat clicked, not much of a laugh. Here he was with an agricultural commune costume concealed under his flying suit, and the Major in Air Force blues. He hoped this was only an oversight, a typical lack of coordination between the Air Force and the C.I.A. as to escape dress. Their costumes didn't match. Obviously one man could not eject without the other. Aircraft this fast didn't carry parachutes.

"What's in the spray — "

"If the plane is hit — "

The two men spoke simultaneously, but the Major proved to be the more courteous. He answered the Doctor's question.

"If we're hit, blooie!" The Major's teeth flashed white.

"I mean if we're only damaged."

"They'll never touch us. You're not setting in one of your black-painted C.I.A. clunkers now. This is the real Air Force. The Chinks haven't upgraded their A.A. missiles in ten years."

Dr. West scratched his flea bites and supposed the Major probably was accurate. For the last fifteen years the Chinese had been concentrating their limited industrial capacity on gigantic, million-pound-thrust, solid fuel I.C.B.M.'s with big, dirty hundred-megaton warheads. Their successful strategy

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had been continual infiltration and limited warfare. Their moves were shielded by blackmail based on the avowed Chinese policy of massive nuclear retaliation.

The Chinese did not bother with modern antiaircraft or anti-I.C.B.M. systems. In the U.N. General Assembly, the Chinese representative alternately stated that no umbrella was needed for their two billion-plus population and that all umbrellas are futile. When he was in a benevolent mood, the Chinese representative would smile and state that huge countries like the United States and the Chinese Confederation of Nations were equally vulnerable.

In the back of Dr. West's skull he realized, remembered this aircraft was aimed much deeper than a few hundred miles into China. It would be penetrating far beyond its fuel point of no return.

II

"Major, rephrasing my question, what happens to us if the plane has, say, mechanical difficulties?"

"Doc, you don't sound very confident about the maintenance procedures of your Air Force. Suppose we have a quadruple flame-out right now over the Pacific," the Major laughed. "Forward in the control module, lonely old Colonel Neller pulls a lever. Blooie! His capsule ejects. Our sealed capsule ejects straight up, and at the top of the arc we get all loose and weightless like we're modern young guys in the Space Corps and not obsolete, old, manned-aircraft personnel. Our drogue chute opens, then our big chute jerks open, and we come down to Earth. No sweat. We float in a whole Pacific Ocean of sweat. What I need to know is what's in our spray tank, Doc?"

Dr. West sat rigid. The Major twice had addressed him as "Doc".

"What dirty soup is in our spray tank, Doc," the Major's voice persisted.

Dr. West couldn't speak. He was afraid, in a moment the Major would say, cat to mouse: "Doc, is your last name West?"

"You feel okay," the Major's voice asked.

Dr. West pointed at his mouth, made swallowing gestures, shook his head. He couldn't speak, nauseated.

Violently he had been denounced in the U.N. General Assembly. Both the United States and Canada had been implicated and denounced by a dozen oriental countries. That was ten years ago when there still were indi-

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vidual oriental nations. The Chinese People's Republic had put on the biggest dramatic production, giving humane refuge to several hundred Eskimo survivors.

Canadian and American lynch mobs had demonstrated outside Dr. West's prison. "Save our Eskimos," they chanted. "Everyone has a right to live." Their waving signs demanded an end to genocide. "An end to murder," their eager young voices shouted as they battered at the prison gates. "Give us Dr. West! Kill him!"

Dr. West bowed his head. It was true. He was a murderer. He had been convicted of genocide. The Canadian prison had closed on him like a softly smothering fist. The ramjet bomber howled and shuddered, and Dr. West realized it was slanting down into the denser atmosphere. Already the bomber was more than halfway across the Pacific. The viewplate between his boots was black as the night beneath, mirroring his eyes.

"What's in the spray tank, Doc?" The Major sounded personally concerned. "You're too old to be a C.I.A. biotechnician. I mean — they're kids in their twenties, just knob twisters. You're someone big. When those C.I.A. spooks shoved you into the aircraft, one of them slipped his tongue. I heard him call you 'Doc'. So I figured you got a Ph.D. Maybe you're even a member of the Harvard Circle in the C.I.A. You must know what we're flying into — "

To Dr. West's relief the Major was proceeding along the wrong track. He still had not recognized Dr. West.

"That spray tank was airlifted into Edwards Air Force Base in a big old C5," the Major persisted. "Word is the C5 came from Arkansas. Pine Bluff, Arkansas. An arsenal there. Even I know that's where they breed the microbes. You're a top scientist or C.I.A. or both." The Major slapped his pistol holster. "You're not expendable like me. I mean this mission must be crucial. Is this the beginning? The spray tank? Are we going to kill millions of Chicoms?"

"No one will die."

"No one will die — like hell!" the Major exploded. "We'll be crossing the Chink coastline in a few minutes. In a few more minutes we'll reach our turn around point. We can't go any farther, and by that time something will happen, courtesy of you C.I.A. spooks. I don't even think I want it to happen! The President said we would never be first to use germ warfare!"

"What do you want?" The

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Doctor's fear and rage and frustration exploded against the Major. "You're damned hysterical for an obsolete military mind who has been eating out of the public trough for twenty years? What do you want? A nice clean antiseptic hydrogen bomb?"

"Just tell me the mission, Doc." The Major's voice became surprisingly patient. "Colonel Neller and I got a right to know what we're risking our lives for. That spray tank may be warmed to 98.6 degrees, but it's no nutrient solution for babies. There's no three-eyed Chink dragon monster swimming in that tank. I mean — " The Major closed his eyes.

Evidently the Major was listening to the Colonel through the intercom. He peered at Dr. West. "Instruments indicate we just crossed the Chinese coastline north of Canton."

"Hey!" the Major exclaimed. "Less than fifteen minutes, and we got to turn around. Doc, what are your orders? You better start spraying!"

Dr. West sat there. "When the red light comes on — on this box — the sequence will begin." He remembered that much.

The aircraft shuddered as it rammed through the thickening atmosphere. A fiery glow engulfed the viewplate beneath the Doctor's feet. We must be down on the deck, the Doctor thought, imagining mountains and radio towers and cliffs looming ahead.

The bomber was dependent upon the precise functioning of its terrain-following radar.

"You'd better press that spray button! We're nearing our fuel point of no return," the Major shouted louder than was necessary. An excited smile began squirming across his face. "There's no time left. Do it. Give it to him. We're as low as we can fly. Dust Mao III's armpits. God help the Chinese and all of us!"

Dr. West glanced at the trembling face. The Major's reactions seemed to be oscillating between excitement and revulsion.

"We're gonna give it to 'em! What are we giving the Chinks? Q-fever?" the Major's voice raced on. "Pneumonic plague when you press that black box on your lap? Mutated scrub typhus? Terrific! Terrible! I can see the black box is set for fifteen minutes spray duration. God! That's a long time. Fifteen minutes! Flying slowed down to 2,000 miles per hour, fifteen minutes makes a spray line 500 miles long!

"I'm not stupid," the Major shouted. "There's ten hours of night over South China. Ten hours before the sun dries out

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your aerosol microbes. Ten hours of damp night while the sleeping Chinese breathe. For ten hours the wind will blow. You C.I.A. spooks always know which way the wind is blowing. Even if its blowing only ten miles per hour across our spray line, that's a hundred miles the aerosol fog will sweep before the daylight comes. The Chinks! God; What's the incubation period?"

Dr. West did not know what to answer.

"I'm not stupid," the Major laughed excitedly. "We even studied arithmetic in the Air Academy. Five hundred miles of spray line multiplied by the wind carrying the fog a hundred miles across the line, covers five thousand square miles. No, that's fifty thousand square miles! How many sleeping Chinks in our fifty thousand square miles?"

"Unfortunately, very few," Dr. West retorted, but immediately regretted it.

"Very few? Like we're not really flying over China?" the Major laughed, and his face twisted in an agonized grin. "Wish the radar that's tracking us was our own. I wish this was an exercise over the Pacific. I mean — like when I was in the last B-58's, and I was so young I was unkillable. Hey, Colonel," he laughed, pressing the throat button of his helmet mike. "Colonel, tell me this mission is an exercise."

The Major stopped talking. Listening, he closed his eyes. He coughed. The Major coughed uncontrollably.

The Major's huge face whirled. "You C.I.A. bum," he yelled into Dr. West's face. "The aircraft's captured by it's autopilot. Colonel says he's smashed the auto pilot, and he still can't gain control. Hidden somewhere on this aircraft is another operating autopilot. For some reason you want to make sure we can't come home."

Consciously, Dr. West had not known this. But he must have known this was a one-way flight because his organism experienced neither violent surprise nor additional fear.

With disappointment, Dr. West wondered whether, with all the political pressure the Harvard Circle of the C.I.A. had exerted to remove him from prison, after all the valuable time the Harvard Circle had spent to rejuvenate him and to carry out parapsychological tests, after he had begun to think he was important again, they had decided he was no better than an expendable technician. Wasted. Expendable.

On the black box on his lap the red light flickered. Without thought, his thumb pressed the

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button as if it had been trained.

"Drop the spray tank!" the Major was insisting into his throat mike. "Save fuel. Save minutes. Listen, Colonel, we're not working for the C.I.A. — "

Abruptly the Major closed his mouth as if the Colonel had said something equally abrupt to him.

From his holster, the Major hauled out the heavy .45 automatic pistol. At a range of six inches, its muzzle hole looked big enough to fall into. But Dr. West's thumb remained on the button. He ignored the gun.

"I'm not going to blow your brains out," the Major gasped. "I wanted to see what you'd do. The Colonel thinks it's possible the Air Force brass agreed to let the C.I.A. do this to us. If that's patriotism, I'm an orphan."

The bomber howled and bucked through updrafts. Dr. West knew the aircraft was laying a trail of aerosol fog across the formerly desolate mountains of South Central China.

"They should have told us," the Major blurted. "I'm a professional. I should have been given the chance to volunteer. The Colonel and me, we're going to complete this spray run on the chance that the Air Force did agree to — sell us out. You C.I.A. spook, we've decided to complete the spraying mission."

The Major waved the almost prehistoric .45 automatic ineffectually. "Now do you feel better or worse?"

Dr. West surreptitiously had managed to raise his thumb from the button. At first his thumb had not wanted to release the button, as if it had an overtrained, one-track mind of its own. The flickering red light stayed on, and Dr. West knew the spraying was continuing anyway. Probably if he never had pressed the button, a back-up mechanism would have initiated the spraying. Probably he was not only expendable; he was superfluous.

Dr. West's mouth twisted with the quick pain of his thoughts. The Major had just stated that the Colonel and he had "decided" to complete the spraying mission. But the aircraft was flying itself, predestined as a missile. It would be too cruel to point out to the Major that no room had been allowed for human decisions. Plainly, the Major needed to believe he had "decided." The Major still was clinging to his illusion of free decision.

"I would like to blow your brains out," the Major repeated and savagely hand operated the slide mechanism, ejecting an unfired cartridge from the automatic pistol.

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Dr. West looked away. He wondered if other military personnel still wore .45 automatics. His own grandfather had kept one beneath his folded T shirts in the top drawer. Way back in World War II, his grandfather had carried it at Kasserine Pass. He said he never fired it. Vaguely, Dr. West remembered that the .45 Colt Government automatic had been Model 1911. 1911? Three generations of officers must have carried these hand-cannons. Before the First World War, this very heavy caliber automatic had been designed to knock down charging bolo-waving Moro tribesman, or so his granndfather had said.

The spraying aircraft bucked savagely, whether from an anti-aircraft missile explosion or a mountain updraft Dr. West did not know. The Major cursed, and Dr. West smiled because it felt good to know that someone else was more frightened than he was. The Major was quite a character.

The Major appeared to be about forty-five years old and obsolete. He had picked the wrong Armed Service. There now were five Armed Services competing for younger men. The most clean-cut young men who wanted to completely leave this crowded world volunteered for the Space Corps and made world-televised crash landings on the Martian craters. More subtle young men with a flair for foreign languages joined the C.I.A., which had acquired its own submarine and VTOL air force to deliver its armored vehicles and heavily armed guerilla war experts. The Navy still owned shoals of nuclear subs and its hulking aircraft carriers and the arrogant Marines. The Army had managed to acquire a transport air force and aerial cavalry and to retain some big tanks, which were used in parades, and control of tactical and defensive missiles. The poor old Air Force was left with its vast seedbeds of ICBM silos, a few transport planes and obsolete interceptors, only a dozen of these operational ramjet bambers, and the Major and his .45.

"If by any chance you C.I.A. turncoats have rigged the autopilot to deliver our aircraft to the Chinks," the Major blurted, "I *will* blow your brains out."

"If we land anywhere we'll be too lucky," Dr. West retorted. "Right now we're spraying across the interior of China. The people down there have been indoctrinated for two generations that we bring germ warfare. They'll greet us with yells and shrieks and fingernails and sharp hoes."

At this, the Major showed his

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big teeth. "You're full of fun and games." He thudded his .45 automatic across his knee. "Chinks won't make me apologize and curse my country on international television. Your two C.I.A. jerks, what were their names, Johnson and Mitsui? Pitiful performance. Doesn't the C.I.A. issue cyanide capsules? Couldn't those two jerks swallow? In the Air Force we don't need cyanide capsules."

He waved his .45 like a magic wand. "If we crash, I'll use the first five bullets on Chinks, and then — "

Dr. West remembered that the .45 automatic holds a seven-shot clip. He remembered the tortured face of Johnson.

The televised faces of Johnson and Mitsui had been bounced off Telstar satellite, and they were seen confessing to everything from dropping virulent hepatitus bombs to potato bugs. Their agonizing scenes had set record Neilson Ratings for their nonpaying sponsor, the Chinese Federation of Nations, and sold American mothers on some of the positive advantages of isolationism.

The aircraft quivered. The red light on the black box on Dr. West's lap flickered out. The spray run was complete.

As if on cue, the bomber exploded.

III

Dr. West, who had rejected life, who had willingly faced the mob, who had made the hard moral decision for Eskimo genocide, who had faced his conviction and the angry fist of the world opinion, now screamed for life.

In total darkness his body whirled, slower and slower. He floated in his nylon safety harness, weightless as a drowned man.

An abrupt jolt whiplashed his neck. The swooping side-to-side, revolving, swinging, rocking slammed his head against the wall of the capsule. Dr. West finally realized the capsule had been ejected from the bomber and the capsule's parachute already had opened.

In the hoarse breathing descending pendulum silence of the capsule, Dr. West's hand crept to his slippery mouth. He bit his hand. The capsule was descending regardless of what he did. The explosion, the ejection from the bomber had been programmed. The smiling faces in the Harvard Circle of the Central Intelligence Agency had delivered him to China.

"Why me? I never volunteered for this," he said. "You C.I.A. wretches, my narcohypnosis has worn off. You may think you

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conditioned my responses like an experimental animal's. I've got news for you. It's worn off. I'm free!" Whatever program was in his skull, as it emerged Dr. West determined he would snafu it, foul it up.

"I'll sell out; I'll bug out. I owe no allegiance to a country who would do this to a man. I've got one ambition, to save my neck and to hell with you!"

The capsule struck the earth. Dr. West raised his head in the blinding darkness of the capsule. He shook the Major's slack shoulder. A gurgling sound —

With shock, Dr. West felt his foot was wet. He groped down. Too much liquid to be blood. The gurgling sound was more distinct when he stopped breathing.

Water was leaking into the smashed bottom of the capsule.

A one in a million spot-landing, Dr. West thought. Instead of striking the mountainsides in this formerly desolate western interior of Szechuan Province, the capsule must have descended into a precipitious river valley where water was — This is what Dr. West thought. — Szechuan Province?

Until now he had not remembered the landing was to be in Szechuan Province. "Memory — triggered!" He realized the landing of the capsule had unblocked data the C.I.A. had drilled into his memory. Now he could even visualize the map. The terrain, changing sets of spy-in-sky photographs were riffled before his inner eyes.

The slender fingers of Dr. George Bruning had paused beside an oval dot on the aerial photo. "Another new irrigation reservoir." Dr. Bruning's calmly intelligent face smiled across the table at him.

Dr. George Bruning was no medical doctor. He was a former boy wonder, a former geophysicist, a former scientific astronaut, whose two lovable children and smiling wife and publicity in *Life Mag* had resulted in his election to The House of Representatives. His political defeat by a movie star two years later resulted in his appointment to the President's Scientific Advisory Staff. He was photographed playing croquet with the President. He was promoted to Chief Scientific Advisor.

The unexpected defection of Australia to Neutralism resulted in wholesale firings in the Central Intelligence Agency. Dr. George Bruning was appointed by the President as Deputy Director of the C.I.A. George might be inexperienced in the use of cloak and dagger, but he soon

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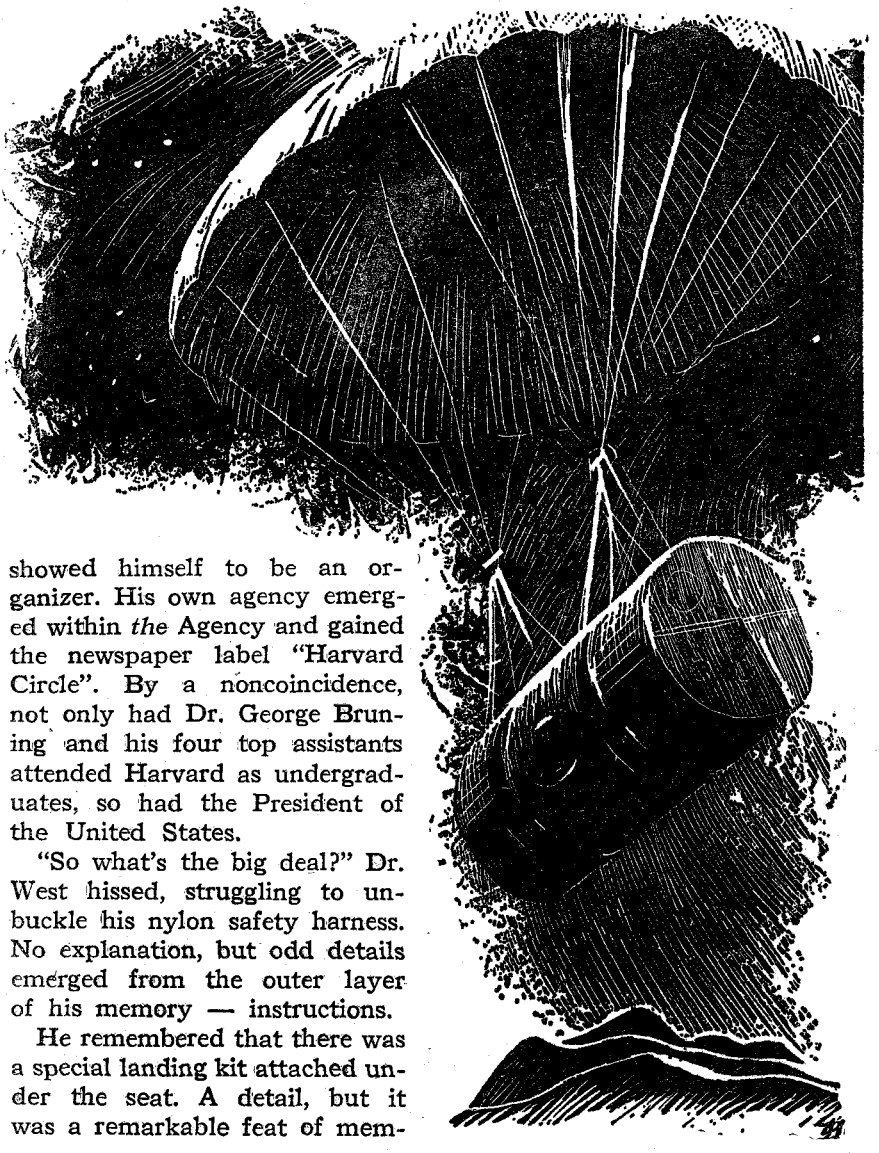

showed himself to be an organizer. His own agency emerged within *the* Agency and gained the newspaper label "Harvard Circle". By a noncoincidence, not only had Dr. George Bruning and his four top assistants attended Harvard as undergraduates, so had the President of the United States.

"So what's the big deal?" Dr. West hissed, struggling to unbuckle his nylon safety harness. No explanation, but odd details emerged from the outer layer of his memory — instructions.

He remembered that there was a special landing kit attached under the seat. A detail, but it was a remarkable feat of mem-

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ory because he had never looked under the seat. His hand felt it though. He could visualize its contents laid out on a white table. Total partial recall.

"You miserable wretches, you're rationing me details." Dr. West's hands lifted the metal kit and attached it to a prearranged hook inside the voluminous padded jacket of his Chinese worker's costume.

"You're all very stupid if you think I can pass for a Chinese just because I'm a student of oriental population problems." Dr. West knew his laughter was frightened with hysteria. "Unfortunately I've a pale prison complexion like a Swede, big brown eyes like an Italian and a long jawbone like a Scotsman." Plainly he was outfitted in this agricultural commune costume for some reason other than to pass as a Chinese at close range.

Water continued to gurgle into the capsule. Dr. West's nostrils detected the faint, yet fetid odor that emanates from steams polluted by humanity. There were no sounds of people outside the capsule.

Not even a frog croaked in the night outside.

From his escape kit, Dr. West's hand detached a small, heavy, no larger than a woman's compact, radio. He knew it was was an automatic signal sender. In order to extend the aerial his hands were trained to locate the upper air vent in the darkness, to twist it open and project the aerial like a collapsible fishing rod into the Chinese night. Dr. West crouched in the blackness of the capsule with his legs in the rising water and his thumb on the signal-switch of the miniaturized ionospheric-ricochet radio beacon. He knew it was broadcasting a continuous signal to someone.

He suposed his body had been trained in a mock-up of this ejection capsule, but he couldn't remember that yet. "You chose me, but you didn't trust me. Only

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part of my memory, part of my conditioning has been unblocked. But I won't wait for the cues like a trained dog. I'm going to tear apart your conditioning, Sammy."

Dr. Sammy Wynoski had been a medical doctor, and before that, by a noncoincidence, Sammy Wynoski had been an undergraduate at Harvard. Joe West had not attended Harvard as an undergraduate, but he had received a partial scholarship to the Harvard Graduate School of Medicine. An inarticulate, intense kook named Sammy Wynoski had roomed next to him during his final years.

Dr. Joe West had returned to the Coast to specialize in endocrinology, which led to research in Arctic ecology, which led to population control research and to the exalted position of Director of Oriental Population Problems Research at the University of California, from which job he was canned, and back to the Arctic where he had enough courage to uncover the real cause of the Eskimo population explosion and to try to do something positive before it was too late. For this, he was sentenced to life imprisonment. For this, had the C.I.A. freed him?

During those hectic years, Dr. Sam Wynoski had been quietly specializing in chemopsychiatry, with an increasing number of week-end jobs as a medical consultant to the Central Intelligence Agency. When good old Harvardman George Bruning was appointed Deputy Director, Sammy Wynoski answered his country's call, his Harvard school buddy's phone call, and became a full-time member of the Harvard Circle of the C.I.A.

Thus Dr. Joe West and Dr. Sammy Wynoski met after ten plus X years in the basement of C.I.A. headquarters. They were at opposite ends of a hypodermic needle which Dr. Sam Wynoski apologetically inserted into Dr. Joe West's arm.

"I've been following your — uh — career, Joe," Dr. Sam Wynoski had said. "That — uh — prison haircut looks real fuzzy."

Dr. West had been in no condition to answer.

"You bunch of amateurs," Dr. West muttered, crouching in the flooding capsule. "Have you got any plan?"

Then the Major groaned. Dr. West's pulse rate jumped. His wrist gave a nervous jerk of its own volition.

"We do — something!" the Major's voice blurted, and he whispered: "Any Chinks out there? — What you doing?"

"Nothing," Dr. West's voice replied soothingly. "Our best

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hope is to stay in the capsule." For some reason, his fingers twisted his wristwatch to the underside of his wrist.

"Damn capsule — flooding," the Major grunted. "We got to get out of here fast." From the thrashing, it sounded as if the Major was having difficulty disengaging himself from his safety harness and assorted intercom wires and oxygen tubes.

"We stay here!" Dr. West's voice stated, his pulse rate accelerating as if readying him for violent combat. He realized — he remembered, when he tipped back his wrist as he was now doing, an injection needle emerged from his wristwatch.

"If the faceless airman becomes uncooperative," Dr. Sammy Wynoski had explained, "simply prick him with the wristwatch needle." Otherwise Dr. West was to wait. He was not to kill the faceless airman until the proper strategic moment. Dr. West began to shiver. He had not remembered this until now.

He had no intention of murdering the Major. He had no intention of murdering anyone, not even a Chinese.

"Those sons of bitches!" Dr. West blurted, in his memory studying Dr. Sammy Wynoski's apologetic face.

"Yeah," the Major wheezed, probably also referring to the C.I.A. and the two men collided in the darkness.

Dr. West realized he almost had jabbed the Major with the needle watch. With his other hand, Dr. West tried to unbuckle the wristband. His fingers wouldn't obey him.

His fingers struggled against his orders. He felt as frustrated as a spastic as he gasped and sloshed about in the water. The wristwatch fell off his wrist. Success! One victory against the Harvard Circle.

"You all right?" the Major demanded.

"Yes, fine. I feel much better. Let's get out of here. You're in command, Major."

"I'm going to unbolt the hatch."

"Hadn't we better wait in the capsule?"

"But you just said — let's get out," the Major hissed, perplexed. Dr. West was contradicting himself.

"The ignorant Chinese peasants can't reach us, can't torture us if we're in the capsule." Dr. West's mouth talked fast. "Yes, they'll think the capsule is one of theirs. Our best hope is for the People's Militia to reach us. Still better is for the Maoist police to find us before the people lynch us. The capsule isn't sink-

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ing anymore. The water isn't rising. Probably we're mired in a rice paddy. Our only hope is to stay in the capsule."

"You gone crazy or something? A minute ago you wanted out. Get out of this capsule!" The Major bodily shoved Dr. West through the hatch into the mud.

Under Dr. West's submerged hands was the bristly feel of newly transplanted rice seedlings.

He lifted his gaze up a steeply terraced mountainside to the night sky.

Behind him, the Major thrashed out of the capsule into the mud and sloshed about in the darkness. With a gasp and a curse, the Major slipped off the crumbling edge of the narrow terrace into the rice paddy below. Those terraced rice paddies were little wider than a man's arm span.

The capsule had not descended into a river valley. Dr. West saw that they had landed on a mountainside so steep that all this terracing would have been uneconomic for men. Immense labor would be required for the limited number of catties of rice the mountain could produce.

The odors of the terrace makers permeated the night air.

"Stinks like human — fertilizer," the Major scrambled back up the hand-packed mud slope. "Millions of Chinks."

"Not Chinese." In his memory Dr. West visualized photographs of only five years ago showing these mountains desolate and dry, completely uneconomic for rice cultivation. During the last two or three years, incredible energy had been expended on these mountain terraces. The mountains were too steep, the terraces too small for efficient use of machinery. Human cultivators would consume too much rice, more energy laboring here than the submarginal rice harvests would replace. Yet these mountains had been laboriously terraced, magically irrigated, freshly handplanted with bristly new rice seedlings.

"The moon is rising." Like glittering liquid steps, the terraced rice paddies shimmered down the mountainside into the dark canyon.

"I smell smoke," the Major whispered. "Millions of Chinks down there."

Dr. West did not bother to disagree with him. Turning, he looked for the dim whiteness of another giant parachute, but there was no sign of Colonel Neller's escape capsule.

IV

The Major held up his shining wet hand, feeling for the

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direction of the night breeze. "God! I'm afraid the wind is coming from where we sprayed. Hell of a note if we get infected by our own spray. Got to move out of here fast!"

Again, Dr. West did not bother to disagree with him. Dr. West's hand reached into his nylon flying suit and on into his commune worker's rags, where his fingers closed on the handle of a dagger he had not known was sheathed there.

The Major pulled at his shoulder.

"Move out! You may be inoculated, but I'm not."

"You don't need to be afraid of this microbiological," Dr. West's voice replied smoothly. "Originally it was an unpredictable bacteria infection of the staph-strep group. When I was Director of Oriental Population Problem Research at U.C. the Defense Department gave us a contract. We were to breed a variety of mutated strains, resistant to the usual antibiotics."

"Let's go." The Major shrilled.

"Listen carefully," Dr. West's voice continued. "The particular strain in our aerosal spray is believed harmless to humans. Fred Gatson, who was on my staff at U.C. as my Chief Bacteriologist, is convinced that adequate tests have been conducted. This strain only affects — "

"Let's go, let's go!" the Major interrupted.

"A mild infection settles in the Fallopian tubes and in the spermatic ducts."

"Sterilized," the Major grunted in partial understanding. "Kill 'em before they're born. Yeah, kill Chinks before they're conceived. Yeah, typically C.I.A. Let's get the hell out of here."

"Not Chinese. No need to leave." Dr. West was remembering the cherubic face of Dr. Fred Gatson. Recent Harvard grad, Fred Gatson had been even younger than Dr. West when their were the big wheels in Oriental Population Problems Research. When Dr. Joe West was fired as Director, amazingly, Dr. Fred Gatson had been appointed to replace him.

Second surprise, when the C.I.A. "freed" Joe West from his life sentence and imprisoned him in the basement of C.I.A. headquarters, Dr. Fred Gatson bashfully reappeared. It turned out Fred had scrambled still higher up the ladder of success. Dr. Fred Gatson was now a member of the Harvard Circle of the C.I.A. Facing Dr. West, Fred appeared uncomfortable, but determined. Fred mostly described his most recent mutation of the staph-strep population control bacteria. "Quite strategic."

"It doesn't affect people," Dr.

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West's voice repeated reassuringly to the Major. "You don't need to fear personal sterilization. The bacterial mutation is quite specific. It only affects Esks.

"Eskimos? They're people. Same species. So it *will* affect me. You're lying so I won't panic," the Major blurted. "I have no intention of panicking. Let's get away from this capsule! Double-time! If Chink peasants catch us here where we sprayed — I mean — we won't father anything. They'll butcher us. Right now I'm not worried about my virility. Let's get out of here."

The Major's heaving chest made a close target, but Dr. West managed to uncurl his own fingers from the handle of the concealed dagger. Those C.I.A. fellows were determined he should kill someone. Dr. West was equally determined he would not kill anyone.

"We'll have to take the escape radio," Dr. West's voice said.

"What radio are you talking about?"

"Continuous signal sender." Dr. West removed it from the capsule. It barely filled the palm of his hand.

Hope returned to the Major's voice. "The C.I.A. *is* looking out for us! C.I.A. snatchplane going to pick us up? Or is this a guerrilla wave length?"

"Guerrilla — " Dr. West lied; it was the communications wave length of the Maoist Police.

"Let's go!" The Major was pulling at him again, making Dr. West's involuntary nervous system clench as if he had been conditioned to kill —

"Doc, our best chance is to get far, far away from this capsule before daylight shows it to the Chinks down there." The Major needed to clutch at any hope. "Then we hide and wait for the guerrillas."

Dr. West tried to keep up with the Major as he lumbered and splashed along the terraces. Joe West suspected there were few, if any, Chinese asleep down there in the canyon. His legs dragged. His legs felt so heavy —

His hand refused to let go of it, but he wanted to throw away the signal sender. Why should he obediently give himself up to the Maoist police? Dr. West couldn't make his fingers let go of the signal sender. "They really conditioned the carrying of this radio into my skull.

"What?" The Major looked back.

"Nothing." Joe West staggered on.

With devilish energy, the Major began clambering up the sides

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of terraces, ascending the mountain like a monkey up a giant staircase. Dr. West's legs grew heavier and heavier, and he gasped for breath, dragging himself up over terraces mainly by the strength of his arms. His leg felt like swollen corpses. "Mental elephantiasis? Imaginary heavy legs? Hell!" Dr. West wondered when he would remember exactly what they had done to his legs.

"Hurry up," the Major hissed from far above.

But Joe West already was exhausted. He gasped for breath, and his heart thudded heavily. As he struggled to climb over the lip of a terrace into the paddy, the muddy signal sender slipped out of his hand. The tiny radio slid back down the terrace wall. Dr. West clung there, then triumphantly bellied over into the rice paddy leaving the radio.

His hands wanted to scramble back down and search for the signal sender. "Oh, but you can't make me do it. No C.I.A. assassins give me orders." He crawled forward across the paddy and struggled up the terrace above, leaving the radio lost in the darkness. "To hell with Harvard! I'm free."

The Major came sliding back down. "Let me help you. That's okay, you're not in shape. Let's go. I won't leave you, Doc."

The Major unmercifully hoisted Joe West to his feet. Supporting him, urging him, dragging him, the Major hauled Joe West up the terraced side of the mountain. Dr. West's legs kept sagging.

"That's okay, do your best," the Major gasped. "We're Americans. We'll stick together."

Dr. West wondered what the Major would say if and when he discovered Dr. West wore a Chinese commune worker's clothes under his nylon flying suit.

"Doc, Doc! Hey, where's the little radio?" The Major began to shake him to search his outer pockets.

"In my hand. No, I dropped it."

"You dropped it?" the Major shrilled. "You just dropped our only chance."

The Major scrambled back down the terrace, leaving Dr. West lying in the mud, listening to the Major slosh about below him. There was not one chance in a million that anyone could find that signal sender in the dark.

Dr. West lay there listening to his own uneven heartbeat. His heart sounded like an candidate for an electronic pacemaker.

"Best way to beat the Harvard Circle — for my heart to

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stop." Dr. West stared up at the moon; the Harvard Circle peered down at him from his imagination.

Dr. George Bruning — Deputy Director, C.I.A.

Dr. Sammy Wynoski—Chemo-psychiatrist.

Dr. Fred Gatson — Population control expert; basteriologist.

But there were two more members of the Harvard Circle! Dr. West's irregularly beating heart cued one of them out of his blocked memory.

Dr. Einar R. Johansen had not been an acquaintance of Dr. West's, but Dr. West had recognized him in the basement of C.I.A. headquarters. Dr. Johansen was easily recognizable. Photographs of such a pioneer heart surgeon frequently had appeared in medical journals.

No doubt the horse-faced surgeon had once studied at Harvard, but more recently Dr. Johansen had been awarded a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from M.I.T. He was better known now as a neurosurgeon than as a heart surgeon, and still better known for his press conferences. He was the doctor who said: "The older I get, the softer my head, so the more I soak up. I learn more now than when I was a kid of forty. At this rate, when I'm eighty I'll revolutionize medicine." This enraged the A.M.A.

On pop-science T.V. shows, Dr Johansen played with electric eels without wearing rubber gloves. He was ingeniously grounded against electrocution He was the first surgeon to design and install an electronic heart pacemaker which was powered by the patient's neuron electricity. No internal batteries to wear out, no wires to fray. "My pacemaker lasts as long as the patient. Eh? Yes, longer!"

The A.M.A. disapproved of such jovially irresponsible talk Dr. Johansen's pictures no longer appeared in medical journals. His smiling horse face appeared in space journals. N.A.S.A. had retained him as a consultant to the Bio-Power project. The goal was a subminiature solid state transmitter utilizing a lifetime power supply from the electrical energy of the astronaut's body.

Where had the transmitter been implanted, the leg, the buttock? Dr. West's teeth gleamed in the moonlight. Some unlikely spot Dr. West remembered Dr. Johansen's wrinkled face bending over him. An operating table? "Before I'm through, sir," the old voice croaked, "You'll be a veritable electric eel. Hah!"

Then the anesthetic engulfed him.

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Dr. West lay in the muddy rice paddy. His legs ached. He knew that Harvard Circle had not gone to all that trouble just to install a duplicate signal sender in his leg.

High below the stars an aircraft droned overhead, its red and green wing lights flitting. Dr. West knew the C.I.A. had not commandeered an Air Force ramjet to fly him over China merely to spray the Esks. An expendable technician could do that. Yet the plan must have something to do with the Esks. The C.I.A. had selected him, and he was the man with the most unpopular theory about the Esks. He was the man who had been convicted of attempted genocide of the Eskimos. He was the most unpopular man in the world.

If the Maoist police caught him alive, if they recognized him as Dr. West, the mass murderer of the helpless Eskimos, the Chicomms wouldn't kill him if they realized he was Dr. West.

The Chinese Federation of Nations joyfully would use him for political purposes. Other American had confessed to anything. Dr. West knew he was no stronger than they.

He smiled with the ultimate fear and fumbled into his layers of wet clothing for the dagger. The Maoists would have enjoyed parading him. Even Mao III, who had been neither seen nor photographed for three years, had expressed the desire to face "the murderous Dr. West, eye to eye!"

Dr. West struggled to remove the dagger from its sheath. "Those fools, those stupid C.I.A. fools!" If the Chicomms took him alive, their glib diplomats would use him like acid to dissolve any last world goodwill the United States had managed to retain. Piously the Chinese representative would tell the General Assembly: "Any nation who would parachute the murderous convict Dr. West upon another nation must be guilty of more than germ warfare, more than genocide — "

Dr. West spat in the mud. He was unable to make his hand draw out the dagger. "You poor thing. You're as helpless as an imperialist potato bug complete with implicating little parachute and U.S. insignia on your wing covers. Even the C.I.A. can't be that stupid. They *must* see one move beyond what I'm seeing."

The Major emerged grunting over the edge of the terrace. "Found it. I'll carry the signal sender now."

Dr. West opened his mouth. He wanted to tell the Major that the signal sender was tuned for the Maoist police wavelength, but he couldn't get the words out.

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Instead he followed the Major across the rice paddy and up the next terrace, and the next, and the next —

The Major came back and helped him again. "Do your best. Easy does it, old man."

Dr. West was not an old man, at least he had been a vigorous young man when he was sentenced to prison. But his legs were an old man's legs, unbelievably heavy.

"When we get to the top," the Major gasped, "I'm hoping there'll . . . uninhabited canyon on the other side. We can hide until . . . guerrillas trace . . . our radio signal."

"In China, no place is uninhabited any more," Dr. West said.

"You got the wrong attitude . . . mustn't give up . . . your C.I.A. guerrillas . . . come for us." The Major raised the tiny radio signal sender, which was squeaking their location to any Maoist police radio location finding equipment within a radius of fifty miles.

By the time the Major had half carried Dr. West to the top of the mountain range, the moon was rapidly descending toward the mountains of Sinkiang. The flat top of the ridge glittered the moon's reflection.

"Irrigation reservoir up here," the Major gasped. "Look at the big pipes and hoses and pumps. Never knew the Chinks had it in 'em!"

"That's a high-voltage power line leading down into your uninhabited canyon," Dr. West said.

"Doesn't mean there's Chinks down there. Never give up!" The Major led the way down the other side of the mountain.

V

They fell down terraces, sloshthrough rice paddies, tripped over irrigation pipes, slid down endless terraces into the faintly humming canyon. This was how the Maoists had forced impossible mountains to yield rice crops. At the bottom of the canyon the power line led to an atomic generator plant.

At the bottom of the canyon, the two men scrambled over an enormous concrete pipe. Dr. West heard the water rushing inside. With unlimited atomic-electric power the Chinese were piping water across vast distances. With an unlimited number of obedient hands, the Maoists had ordered terracing of mountains previously considered "impossible for wet-rice cultivation."

Impossible these tiny rice paddies were for Chinese commune workers who needed 1,200 to 1,800 calories of rice-energy per

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day. If Chinese tended these inefficient vertical fields, they would need to eat the entire harvest in order to survive and multiply. There would be no surplus. But Dr. West knew that these tiny paddies were hand-tended by beings who could not only survive, but could labor from dawn to dark and multiply like rabbits on only 600 calories of rice-energy per day!

As the Major led the way across the dark canyon, he stumbled over the sleeping body of the Maoist solution to the agricultural problem.

"Don't stangle him. Don't kill him," Dr. West hissed. "The man's an Esk."

But the Major tightened his grip on the gurgling throat. "Got to kill him. Would yell for help."

"He's sure to be an Esk. I assume he's descended from at least three generations of Maoist conditioning. I believe if I ordered this Esk to go back to sleep, he would go back."

"You assume — you believe," the Major panted angrily. "I know — he stinks like a Chink." There was a vertebral crunch, and the body shuddered and quivered like a dying fish. "He was a Chink."

Dr. West did not try to explain how he knew the man was an Esk merely by standing near him. It was a feeling. "A very useful trick," Dr. George Bruning, Deputy Director of the C.I.A., had remarked. "You have a sixth sense there, Joe."

Dr. West followed the Major down the canyon along the side of the roaring concrete pipe. Someone, perhaps a thousand miles away, turned a rheostatic switch which electro magnetically opened giant valves, and the roar of irrigation water within the pipe increased. Ahead of Dr. West, the sky grew white with dawn.

The Major's gaze darted frantically from side to side. He appeared to be searching for a place of concealment, but all the natural vegetation in the canyon had been gathered, plucked, uprotted to feed the miserable cooking fires of the Esks. The two men threaded their way among sleeping lumps of cloth.

Around dead fires, the faces of the sleeping Esks were animated, twitching, smiling, baring their teeth, seemingly more alive than when the Esks were conscious.

Clutching his .45 as though it were his mother's hand the Major tiptoed on, then looked back. It was evident he wanted to turn back. The further down the canyon they went, the more numerous the sleeping Esks. The brightening dawn illuminated the

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Major's frightened face. He kept glancing up at the terraced mountainsides for some place to hide. Yet he stubbornly continued down the canyon.

In the canyon, sleeping clumps of men, women, children lay — clustered together for warmth — all around the two quietly walking men. The Major's hand closed on Dr. West's shoulder, transmitting his shivering fear to the Doctor. "Tell me they're Eskimos." the Major breathed. "If they're Chinese — "

"Chinese would be awake and screaming at us right now," Dr. West whispered. "The Esks don't pay much attention to us. Observe, the Esks sleep intensely, as if they're on another planet when they're asleep. Look at that smiling face. We've tried truth drugs, but no human has been able to learn what dreams the Esks have. Awake, the Esks don't know. It is as if the Esks lead *two* lives, concurrently yet separately. That is why the Chinese word for them is Dream Persons."

A buzzer sounded, resounded up and down the canyon. Blankly, the Esks stood up. There was none of the yawning and stretching, eye-rubbing and giggling, hawking and spitting which would have characterized real Arctic Eskimos or Chinese or Americans. The awakened faces of the Esks became expressionless. The men and some of the women started climbing the steep trails among the rice terraces, their hoes already in their hands. Efficiently they did not urinate until they stood in the rice paddies. Up there on the terraces, the Esks began hoeing without breakfast.

"What do we do now?" the Major whispered, still shivering as if he expected to be assailed by screaming Chinese with upraised hoes. "Do you think they've sent someone off to telephone for the Chinese soldiers?" He pointed at an overhead wire.

Dr. West smiled down at the Esk children crowding around them. When he smiled at them, their blank faces reflected his smile, lighting up with joy almost like children's faces anywhere.

Dr. West squatted down and tried to talk with them, using the Central Eskimo dialect he had learned in the Arctic. He tried introducing Cantonese words, then Mandarin Chinese. He looked up at the Major and shrugged and wearily smiled and shook his head. "These people — the Esks — have increased millions of times in numbers since I identified them in the Arctic ten years ago. Individually, they — each generation — has deteriorated as to outward

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awareness. The original little group I studied in the Arctic were excellent imitators of the Eskimos. But these people, these children, they're almost nonverbal. They're not imitating the Chinese. They're not trying very hard to imitate anything human."

A heavily pregnant woman prodded one of the circle of boys and made upward motions with her hands. Evidently the boy was big enough; he should be up there working on the rice terraces. He appeared to be about ten years old.

"That boy is about a year old," the Doctor said. "The wonderful and terrible thing is that these people's bodies mature so much more efficiently than ours. Their prenatal development is as perfectly straight forward as if God had had a plan — this time."

Dr. West became excited as he always did when he launched into the subject that had overwhelmed his life. "Why should our human fetuses take nine months to be born. Because of our evolutionary history on this planet, the growth of our embryos follows the old paths. Gills appear and are absorbed. An obsolete tail begins and disappears. Primitive appendages from our evolutionary past are recapitulated. This is our heritage from the billions of years of changing life forms on this Earth." Dr. West hurled the bitter question no one could answer, "Now we are among people whose babies are born in a month and mature in three years. That does not reflect the evolutionary history on this planet. Now tell me if the Esks are human?"

"You murderer!" the Major hissed unexpectedly. "Finally I've figured out who you are. You genocidal maniac! You've *got* to be Dr. West. On the T.V. news, your escape, a couple of months ago. You narrow maniac, are you telling me the Eskimos aren't human?"

"These Esks aren't. The Eskimos are, if there are any real Eskimos still alive. Don't tell me even a calloused military mind like yours has been softened by the '*Esks are Eskimos, love the Eskimos*' campaign."

"You murdered hundreds of Eskimos. Look at these little children. We just sprayed 'em," the Major bleated, as if it had been a death spray.

The children scrambled about unconcernedly. A little girl clung to Dr. West's leg.

"Don't tell me that little girl isn't human," the Major said. "She is human. Look at her little hands, ears, eyes."

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"You were happier when you thought we were spraying Chinese children," Dr. West retorted.

The Major made an abrupt move with his .45 and let his arm drop down hopelessly. "You're insane, criminally insane! Your were convicted of genocide and sent to a prison for the criminally insane. The Eskimos are the world's happiest, most cooperative people."

"And you believe that murderers should be executed," Dr. West challenged, hoping the Major would fire the gun, kill him, foul up all the intricate, unknown plans of the C.I.A.

"These *are* people," the Major pressed. "Call them Esks or Eskimos, they're just as human as we are. Right home at Edwards Air Force Base, whole crews of happy Eskimos are working at the base, more all the time. Wonderful, obedient, happy people, and you tell me they're not human."

"You sound like a bleeding heart of a Maoist," Dr. West retorted. "A rehash of the half-truths when I was cruxif-excoriated before the United Nations General Assembly. You're remembering the Chinese Communist Party Line."

"You're the traitor. Genocidal maniac is the truth," the Major added more calmly: "That whole U.S. Administration was voted out of office at the next election."

"A lot of voters believed the Communist Party line. It's funny now. My guilt rubbed off all over when only I made the decision. If you believe the Chinese fulminations of ten years ago, I made old Adolph Eichmann look like an innocent saint. I was the threat to all the yellow skins and brown and black. I was the racial butcher."

" . . . because the Eskimos weren't bothering anybody." The Major couldn't keep his voice steady. "It wasn't their fault that radio active cesium is concentrated by the lichen-caribou food chain. The Eskimos always had eaten caribou. None of you wise-guy, know-it-all doctors told them not to — "

"The extreme mutational theory has no basis in fact. When will you stop confusing Eskimos with Esks?"

"They're the same. It's a word trap, a phoney word trap to justify your plan for world genocide of the Eskimos. The Eskimos can't help it if they've started multiplying fast."

"Major, you don't know anything, except what you've recalled in bits and pieces from old T.V. newscasts of ten years ago when you had a mental age

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of about ten and weren't paying much attention. How old do you think I was then? How old do I look now?"

The Major blinked. "You're damn well preserved — in prison you weren't in the sun. In prison is where you'll go if we ever get out of here. Right now I need you. You talk to these people. Tell them to hide us. Tell them we will free them from the Chinese. We'll give them self-determination, food, real clothing, medical supplies if they'll hide us from the Chinese."

"Oh, brother!" Dr. West laughed savagely. "You are terrified! Why not promise them guns and ammunition?"

"Sure, we'll drop guns. Some of their people must be the guerrillas."

"Don't you wish it were so?" Dr. West taunted. "These people aren't Eskimos. These people aren't human. These are *Esks*. Throw away your expectations of human behavior. Esks don't behave that way. Do you see any Chinese guards? Humans this miserable would need guards. Esks aren't human. They don't revolt. They feel no need to be guerrillas. Or to vote. They don't need to. They're getting their way. They're getting what they want — or what something out there wants for them. They're filling up our world!"

"Tell them to hide us. That's an order."

"Very rapidly they're filling our world."

"Tell them to hide us, damn you!" The Major's .45 was raised again.

"Where can they hide us? Under their bodies?"

"They must have houses someplace." The Major peered about.

Shrugging, gesticulating, Dr. West tried to communicate with some of the women. "They say to climb over that ridge, that hill to the next valley," he lied. "They say hide on the hill."

He regretted his lie as they struggled up the terraces. His mouth had lied before he had a chance to think. It was as if the Harvard Circle of the C.I.A. had drummed into his skull that he must go to a hilltop. The signal sender would have more range from a high place. Was that it?

His heavy legs ached and dragged. His heart thudded. He was exhausted. He couldn't make it all the way to the top of the mountain. It was a mountain of endless terraces, giant steps too big for any man. The world whirled dazzlingly bright as Dr. West fell in the mud.

"You got to get up." The Ma-

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jor was pulling at him. "Saw a copter out there. A little speck, zigging around like it's looking for something. You don't think the Chicomms are tuned in on our guerrilla wave length?"

Dr. West started up at the muddy little signal sender in the Major's huge hand. "Possible." That was the truth. In fact, it was the understatement of the year. The C.I.A. radio was tuned to the Maoist frequency.

"How do I turn this thing off without busting it?"

"Don't turn it off. Probably the helicopter is simply supervising the Esks," Dr. West's mouth lied. "To turn it off, you break it. The signal sender will be broken, done for, and so will — "

"All right, let's go, we can still reach the top." The Major tried boosting him up the slippery wall of a terrace. "Got to reach the top. Irrigation pumps up there, I think. Can hide underneath. Won't be seen from air." The Major wheezed and gasped for breath, plainly feeling his forty-plus years and a candidate for a coronary.

Dr. West fell again. "Leave me." He had difficulty enunciating the words. "I don't want you to die for me."

"No, got to help you. In spite of everything we're on the same side, Doc." With strength and tenderness, the Major helped Dr. West climb. "Some time — when you got time — you got to prove to me those Esks down there are different from Eskimos. I don't believe it. I'll never believe it."

VI

When the two men finally wormed under the throbbing irrigation pump on the crest of the hill, Dr. West regained his breath and spoke intently through the roar of the pump. "If you could compare their chromosomes under the electron microscope, if you were a keen observer, you would see that their genetic coding, the DNA recipe which guides the growth of an Esk, is too neat, too perfect, too repetitive among different individuals to be — human."

Deaf to a maniac's ravings, the Major peered out, clutching his .45 savagely as if it were an antiaircraft weapon. "The copter's moving to a new position, like they're — sure as hell — looking for something."

"The simplest misexplanation is yours, that the Esks are mutated Eskimos." Dr. West continued talking at cross-purposes to the Major. "Occam's Razor, an old scientific rule of thumb, suggests if there are several pos-

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sible explanations for a mystery, pick the simplest. Mutated Eskimos is the simplest explanation. It is the most conservative explanation. It is the explanation picked by so-called reputable physioligists. It is the explanation people want to continue to believe."

"The copter's moving out over the valley where we were — " The Major stopped.

The Doctor's hand closed around the dagger within his layers of clothing, and he kept talking as though each sentence might be his last. "Mutations usually involve a single trait or related set of traits. But any honest study of the Esks shows they differ from human beings in hundreds of ways, physiologically and psychologically."

"The copter is moving from position to position like they're trying to get a radio-location fix on us. Do you think this signal-sender — "

"And the Esk child acts happier and more cooperative than a human child and efficiently grows into an adult in three years. Eating only six hundred calories of food a day, an adult Esk outworks a Chinaman. And breed, breed like lemmings! For what purpose are the Esks overrunning the Earth? Why are the Chinese, we, everyone letting the Esks multiply?"

"The copter's heading in our direction."

"The simplest misexplanation is that the Chinese are using the Esks for politico-economic purposes. The Esks ease the Chinese agricultural problem. The Esks produce farm surpluses. The Esks produce a favorable balance of trade. The Esk manpower freed Chinese manpower to police India. But all this is the superficial explanation. It does not reveal the underlying — "

Copter straight for us!" The Major began smashing the signal sender with the butt of his .45.

Dr. West could not stop talking. He expected to be stilled for ever. "Even our President seems to believe the simple-headed explanation that the Chinese are using, breeding, the Esks as part of the endless war, simple power politics. But I believe the Esks are using the Chinese!"

The clattering wail of the jet-copter chewed through the roar of the pump.

Under the iron pump, as if cued by the sounds of the helicopter, Dr. West's hand pulled down the zipper, opening the Air Force blue nylon and freeing the quilted Chinese blue cotton within.

The copter squatted down. It

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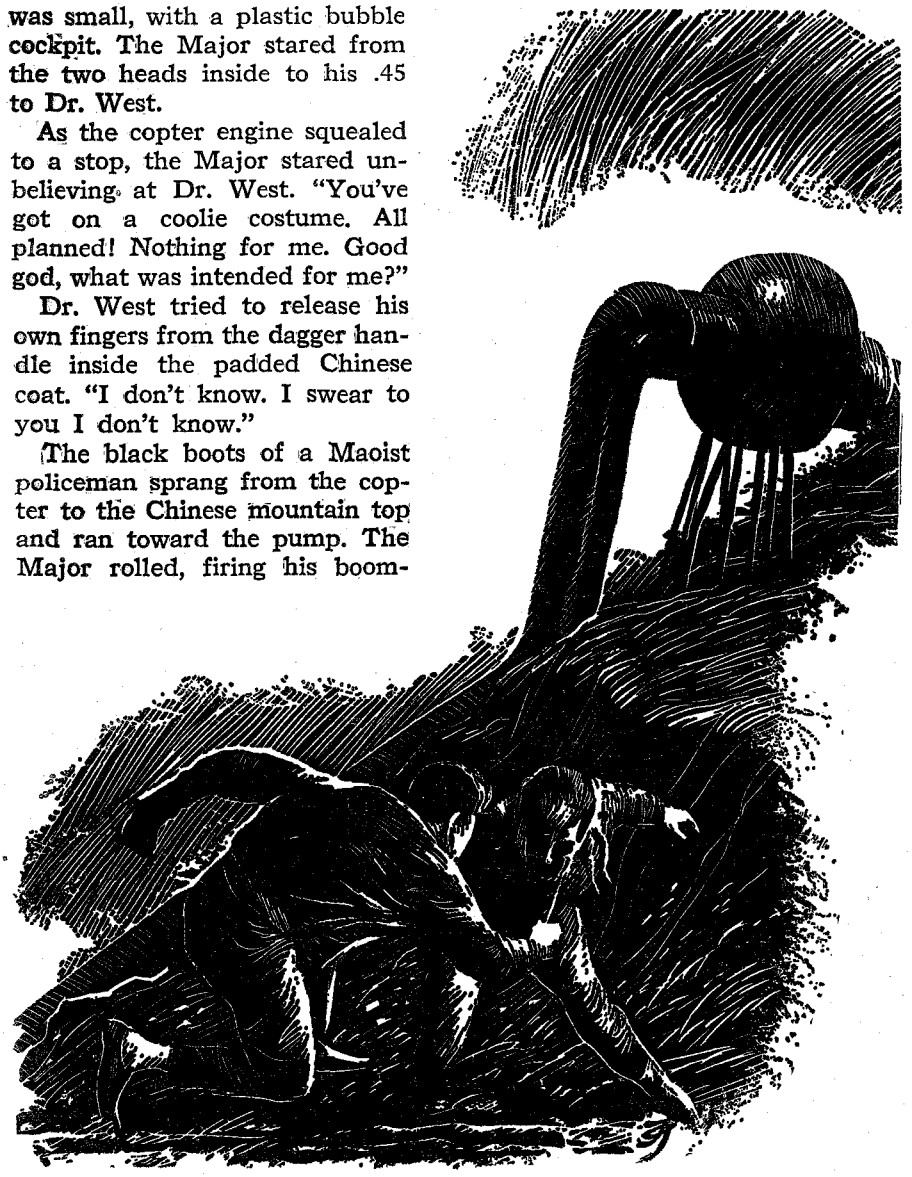
was small, with a plastic bubble cockpit. The Major stared from the two heads inside to his .45 to Dr. West.

As the copter engine squealed to a stop, the Major stared unbelieving at Dr. West. "You've got on a coolie costume. All planned! Nothing for me. Good god, what was intended for me?"

Dr. West tried to release his own fingers from the dagger handle inside the padded Chinese coat. "I don't know. I swear to you I don't know."

The black boots of a Maoist policeman sprang from the copter to the Chinese mountain top and ran toward the pump. The Major rolled, firing his boom-



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ing, deafening .45 automatic three times. The Major's wide-eyed face twisted back toward Dr. West, but the round eye of the .45 followed too slowly.

With surgical precision, Dr. West's hand thrust the dagger into the auricle of the Major's heart.

Dr. West, the man, sobbed.

Helpless anguish lay within his body which he could not control. A Chinese hand disengaged his fingers from the dagger.

"Liu," exclaimed the excited, young Cantonese voice above Dr. West's body. "Where could he have gotten such a dagger? It is a Mark III dagger."

"My eyes can see it is a Mark III dagger," the copter pilot retorted. "This foreign devil may have killed an Inner Officer to get it. Or it was stolen; but these official daggers are numbered. It is a true Mark III Dagger. The number on the blade — it is a low and important number!"

"Liu, with care we should tread. Perhaps the Mark III dagger was issued to him." The young Cantonese voice thickened. "Great care, and yet he is only wearing commune clothing, and he has the white corpse-face of a typical Big-Nose, and yet there is the radio signal to explain. See, here is the little transmitter. The other Big-Nose must have smashed it. Extensive photographs should be taken for the record or our buttocks may be burnt." The black boots ran back to the copter.

"Eh, yes, you — yes, YOU!" the copter pilot nudged Dr. West with his boot toe. "Did you understand our words?"

Dr. West feigned unconsciousness.

"He does. He understands us," the copter pilot called.

The younger man with the camera backed off, and the copter pilot followed. Like doctors in consultation, in sinister whispers they argued. Then the young Maoist policeman advanced warily toward the pa-

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tient. "It is with great regret that official regulations require us to bind your wrists to your ankles," he blurted. "I, for one, would never do such a thing." With professional expertise, he knotted the rope.

The rope was not tight. The young Maoist policeman had been careful not to interfere with Dr. West's circulation. Having already tied him so he could not walk, the two men had to hoist Dr. West and carry him to the helicopter.

"For a thin man — very heavy!" the young one gasped.

"Big bones. Primitive skeleton. Typical Big-Nose," the pilot retorted.

"Did you notice the wrists of the dead one are hairy as an apes!" The young voice echoed the racial disgust. "Weak, blue eyes. Shot at me twice."

"Three times. So close to your belly even a drunken sot Imperialist should not miss. Either you are dead or there was something wrong with his bullets."

As the helicopter scuttled upward, it side-slipped violently. Its door flew open. The sack in which the Maoist policeman had collected the battered signal sender, the dagger, Dr. West's C.I.A. "escape kit" and the .45 slid across the dented aluminum floor, disgorging its contents. The young policeman fell to his knees, snatching at these sliding objects. The copter lurched upward, slamming the door shut, and the Major's head flopped against Dr. West's bound foot and wrist. The Major's blue eyes were white rimmed in death.

Dr. West closed his own eyes. Whiplashes of self-flagellation slashed through the numbness inside his skull.

I can't rationalize that those master minds in Harvard Circle killed him. When he turned the muzzle of the .45 at me, all my vainglorious hopes that he would kill me turned into lies. Instinctively I dodged from the nothingness of death. My mind and body joined in thrusting the dagger with all my strength as if he were an enemy. God help my friends! My hand would have killed him even if I had been free from narcohypnosis, and I may have been free.

The copter tilted. Dr. West stared down at the truncated mountain peaks. *The guys in the Harvard Circle should be happy now. The Chinese have me.* Tiny reservoirs, thin pipelines, in every direction the Chinese world was terraced and glittering with microscopic rice paddies. Ten years ago these had been barren mountains, but now the myriad, multiplying hands of the Esks were changing the world.

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Ten years ago in the Arctic, I thought I was free to act like God. I thought I realized the implications of the group of Eskimos on the Boothia Peninsula, who suddenly and mysteriously had outgrown their food supply. The Canadian Government began parachuting additional Family Allowance to them. More and more planes, more and more food drops begat more and more "Eskimos." The authorities in Ottawa labelled my on-the-spot estimate of the birth rate impossible.

When I went on to Washington and tried to report the even more sinister evidence I had collected as to the origin of the Esks and finally asserted they were not Eskimos, the official reaction was "Oh, you're Dr. West who was fired from some population study at the University of California. No wonder you were fired; you're — uh — obviously emotionally disturbed."

By the next summer the damned fools in Ottowa and Washington were sending ice-breakers towing whole barge loads of food. "Human life is sacred", they said. "No one must starve".

There were plans to relocate the surplus Eskimos, distributing them throughout the North. By now Canadian Government officials admitted that the birth rate of the Boothia Eskimos was "startling"; but they said "we can hardly drown the little beggars just because their mothers refuse to swallow birth-control pills."

With a bush planeload of luggage, I flew back to the Boothia Peninsula before the food barges could get through the shore ice. Having made my decision, I felt a tremendous freedom to act. Gambling with people's lives is everyday work for doctors. At that time the staphyloccocus strains which specifically infect the Fallopian tubes and spermatic ducts had not been fully tested on a broad sample of human beings.

The June sun melted the snowbanks. The insects and birds appeared, and the Eskimos gathered to await the unloading of the barges. Laughing and frolicking, the Eskimos played with the aerosol cans labelled *mosquito spray,* which Dr. West was handing out to them.

Of the two thousand Eskimos, the largest concentration of Eskimos the North had ever seen, less than one hundred showed any symptoms of infection. The other 1,900 turned out to be Esks. The Esks turned out to be immune to the ordinary human infections. Of the hundred real Eskimos, twenty-two died. They should

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not have died, but they died from this minor staphylococcus infection.

The hunt was on. There I stood. The tragedy became much greater than my life or death or the death of the twenty-two Eskimos. It was my trial for attempted genocide that brought the attention of the world upon the plight of the rapidly increasing Esks. The Swedes and Russians sent food.

In the United Nations General Assembly the oriental bloc seized upon my guilt and made it the guilt of Canada and the United States. The Chinese and other nations sent massive aid, and the evacuation of surplus Eskimos to any country willing to accept them and pay the transportation costs began. The Esks spread —

That is my crucial guilt, that my actions aided the spread of Esks. I should have ended myself then. I would not have lived to see a billion Esks in China alone!

The helicopter veered, and far below was exposed the gray overcast that shrouds any modern city. The copter pilot chattered through his radio to the ground.

Baring his teeth, Dr. West lunged at the door of the helicopter. As his skull rammed the door outward, his eyes glimpsed nothingness.

Surprisingly strong hands dragged his head and shoulders back into the helicopter.

"Liu, this one would have fallen to his ancestors — but he paused."

VII

The blades of the helicopter whirled through the thickening smog. The continuous squealing agony of its jet engine lowered. With a bounce that slammed Dr. West's face against the floor, the copter landed; and the Maoist policeman kicked the door open.

"You're my responsibility no more," the young policeman laughed with relief, and Dr. West was dragged out of the copter by noisy, black-uniformed, young Chinese. "The Interrogator must think this Big-Nose is a big fish," a girl's voice excitedly laughed. Another voice asked: "Has proper caution been taken to telephone Peking, Capital of the World — Praise be to Mao III." A second girl's voice laughed: "Liu, you handsome pilot, where are you studying tonight?"

An inhaling gasp quieted the black-uniformed crowd on the heli-roof of the massive concrete police headquarters.

"Has no protection been taken against infection? You are all quarantined! Orderly, place the assassin on the cart. No, don't wheel him this way. Take him

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down through the freight elevator."

Dr. West was to recognize this cold voice again after he had been stripped, sprayed, fumigated and pricked for a blood sample. He lay on a cold operating table.

"Cover him with a sheet." It was the voice of the Interrogator.

The ceiling was enamelled white.

"Make him comfortable with a 2 c.c. injection."

Dr. West began to relax. He felt warmer. The effect was similar to a narcotic the Harvard Circle had administered.

"You will be interested to know that a large proportion of the working people in the United States and the intellectuals and the medical people, such as yourself, as you no doubt know, are in sympathy with the peace-loving aims of the Chinese Federation of Nations. When I say interested I mean you will be interested to know that we already had been notified of your war-mongering flight by many highly placed sources in the United States. The exact flight plan of your intruding aircraft was known to us, and proper authorities had been notified, and of course your obsolete aircraft was tracked by our radar and our excellent interceptors, which could have shot it down at any time had such an order been given."

Dr. West listened to the intense voice but had difficulty following its meanings.

"You will be interested to know that in a few hours our excellent medical technicians will have positively identified the aerosol spray which descended from your aircraft, and no doubt they already have several cures for it. You need not fear symptoms from your own exposure to the spray. We will innoculate you against its effects. To confirm our already excellent diagnosis, please tell us what nonfiltrable virus is involved?"

Dr. West awakened slightly. He had assumed, guessed, that a bacterial agent of the staph-strep group had been used. This bacterium should be easily recognizable by culturing and microscopic inspection. Why was the Interrogator talking about a nonfiltrable virus? Pathologists and technicians tend to blame a nonfiltrable virus when NOTHING can be found.

"What virus were you forced to spray against your will upon helpless women and children. Each word you speak will save the life of a child."

Dr. West knew that the only effective resistance when undergoing interrogation is to say nothing. As in a psychological test, anything you say, lie or

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truth, will be filed and cross-filed, so that the more you lie, the more clearly the watery rings of truth will rise through the pool of lies.

Dr. West tried to say nothing. But his mouth opened. As his mouth began to speak, Dr. West realized that this would not be a dialogue between himself and the Interrogator. Three points of view were present. The third was speaking from his mouth now. The Harvard Circle had entered the interrogation room — in spirit, a damn treacherous spirit!

"I am Dr. Joseph West," his mouth announced. "Ten years ago I attempted to exterminate the Eskimos." What was the Harvard Circle trying to do to him?

"We are aware of who you are." Then the Interrogator whispered something aside to someone else. "Answer our questions please" the Interrogator continued. "Do not volunteer extraneous information. We know everything already. Answer our questions quickly," the Interrogator's voice rose. "What is the viral agent?"

"I am Dr. West," his mouth repeated. "Dr. Joseph West. This can be easily checked. No doubt there are photographs of me in your news archives. Dr. Joseph West — I was convicted of Eskimo genocide. I am acknowledged to be the greatest expert on the Esks, Eskimos, Dream Persons as you term them. During my years in prison I was allowed to continue my research."

This last was a lie. Dr. West had vegetated in prison.

"Answer the question! What is the virus?" The Interrogator sounded nervous. "What's the virus?".

Dr. West stared at the ceiling grill. Something had winked, reflected light, a glass lens behind the grill. No doubt they were filming and recording.

He tried to move his arm, but it was strapped, and something was pressing into his wrist. No doubt his pulse and perspiration reactions were being taped.

The Harvard Circle really might have notified Chinese Communist agents in the United States that his aircraft was coming over!

"Your Mark III dagger is a forgery! Your pulse becomes abnormally fast," the Interrogator's voice said. "You feel guilt and fear — but be assured we will do nothing to harm you. We bow down before the immortal thoughts of our Grandfather Mao: 'All men should be treated both with justice and mercy.' Therefore feel free to tell us the virus!"

What had speeded Dr. West's pulse rate was rage! Those C.I.A. spooks callously had pre-

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pared him to murder the Major as one minor maneuver. The spraying, the ejection, the dagger, the signal sender, the stabbing — all were intended to increase Dr. West's chances of being taken alive by the Maoist Police. All were intended to give him an aura of importance.

"I am Dr. Joseph West," his mouth repeated with sickening fatuousness.

"Damn it!" Dr. West shouted. "How the hell do I know what was in that spray. They let me think it was a bacterial agent to sterilize the Esks, to demonstrate to you that selective sterilization of the Esks is possible. And it is possible!"

"Good, we are glad to hear that you will cooperate. In typical fashion, your Central Intelligency Agency has tricked you. What virus do you think the spray contained?"

"Virus? How the hell should I know? I doubt if it is a virus, but I'll give you three guesses. One, a virus with a long incubation period. In about 21 days the Esks will undergo interesting changes. Personality reversal. Cute. Changed into what they really are. They'll tear you apart." Dr. West gasped for breath, unsure whether he or the Harvard Circle was lying now.

"Number two," he laughed. "The spray could consist of distilled water. No wonder your medical personnel are baffled. But don't let it baffle you. It means the spray run was a decoy. The C.I.A. wanted to use an Air Force plane to attract your attention to something or distract your attention from something. The State Department in Washington did not want the C.I.A. Warhawks to use a real bacterial spray that would force you toward retaliation. So, distilled water? Does that make Peking feel safer?

"Number three," Dr. West laughed in confusion. "This is the possibility to worry you tonight. You'll never sweat it out of me because I don't know what it is, except to say that the men in the Harvard Circle get up very very early in the morning, and when they go to this much trouble to deliver a man to China, they must have one hell of a reason."

The Interrogator made a sad sighing sound. "Please, but you must tell us the truth, Dr. West. You are a brilliant man, a scientist who searches for Truth. Ten years ago when you made your free decision to eliminate the Dream Persons, you acted upon it freely because you believed it was the Truth. In China you would never have been considered a criminal because you

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believed in Truth. You could — you still can live here freely to work and study. In the Chinese Federation of Nations we give honor and assistance to all searchers after Truth. As our Grandfather Mao once said: (May a thousand blossoms bloom, a thousand schools of thought contend.) Only in China are you free to speak the truth. What virus did your Central Intelligence Agency force you to spray upon the peace-loving peoples of the world?"

This soothing flow of words continued until Dr. West began to drowse. He was physically exhausted. The third party to the trilogue, the Harvard Circle, refused to feed new answers into his mouth.

It was as if the start of the interrogation had cued from his skull his oral self-identification as Dr. Joseph West, famous genocide, expert on Esks. Now the Harvard Circle wanted to say no more at this time. Or he had forgotten what he was supposed —

"You can sleep as soon as you tell all about the virus, Dr. West." The Interrogator resorted to flashing lights and buzzers and, after an indeterminate period of time, to small electric shocks.

Once or twice Dr. West tried to argue, vaguely aware that his voice was incoherent. Suddenly he screamed; his breath squawled! God, what were they doing to him?

"Message for Mao III" he heard his voice squawk. Torture had cued the next communication from the Harvard Circle.

"I must be taken to Mao III," his hoarse voice repeated over and over. No matter what they did to him, try as he could, he was unable to tell the Interrogator what the message was. "Stop them, stop them. I don't know."

"Of course we cannot actually take him to our beloved Chairman," the Interrogator's voice agreed with someone equally invisible. "Apologies that so much time has been spent; a little more time will be needed; electrocranial acupuncture is required if we are to free the core of truth in this man. It seems that rigid blockades have been placed in his memory, perhaps hypnotically."

Oblivion.

There were black silk slippers on his bare feet. He lay in a different room. He was wearing a coarse gray cloth uniform. His head ached. When he raised his fingers to his head, he found his hair had been shaved off and there were a number of bumps, little knobs, on his scalp. He could find no evidence of torture on his body. His legs ached and appeared swollen, but this probably was due to . . . he knew but couldn't

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remember what had caused his swollen legs. Perhaps the unaccustomed exercise of struggling up and down mountain rice-terraces?

An intense-faced Chinese hurried into the white room. The man inhaled, standing very straight in his gleaming, black silk robe, which was the historical Chinese costume Maoist officials had reassumed in recent years. Dr. West recalled that the color black symbolized virtue, and the embroidered dragons, good luck and power. Coarse blue cotton uniforms were for the troops.

"Time is flowing past." The man added with a typical interrogator's ploy: "Everything is known."

In recognition of that intense voice, Dr. West's body winced, and it was with a drying mouth that he tried to answer back like a punished adolescent. "If you know everything — you are too prescient to be the — Interrogator. You should be God or Mao III."

"That is a sacrilegious statement to your god and to Mao III, who sits in judgment here at the center of the world."

"Then I have been flown to Peking?"

"You have been disinfected both externally and internally," the Interrogator replied. "You have the honor . . ."

But a man in a thick, leaden apron with goggles on his forehead resembling a second set of eyes interrupted. "Ah, — we need him for an hour now."

Dr. West recognized the man's profession as X-ray specialist. Very funny. Did they intend to X ray his internal organs for bombs?

"Later! It is too late. The time has been set." In the Interrogator's voice there was irritation and strain, and he turned back to Dr. West and managed a conspiratorial smile.

"You are the first foreigner in three years to be so honored. This you will remember and cherish. You can drink your tea later."

"Ta-tung!" the Interrogator shouted:

"The eastern sky reddens,
The sun rises
And in China the line of Maos has come!
They strive for the welfare of the people.
They are the great saviours of the people!"

Two men dressed in black silk who appeared to be minor officials trundled in on a low vehicle with four padded seats. Dr. West thought it resembled an electric cart for a golf foursome. The golf cart was followed by half a dozen bored soldiers. They stood scratching inside their padded blue uniforms while the

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two men in black bowed unenthusiastically toward the Interrogator. "Ready? We only have the office for ten minutes."

"He can understand everything you say," the Interrogator snapped.

One official glanced at his wristwatch, then wearily rolled his gaze to the ceiling. "You should have notified me of that fact in writing."

It was plain that the Interrogator had much less influence here in Peking.

VIII

As the electric cart trundled along endless concrete corridors, the soldiers lagged further and further behind; and Dr. West realized the building must cover acres of ground, a veritable Pentagon.

Even seated in the cart, he was in pain from his swollen legs. The electric cart whirred on and on. His head felt as if a fist were tightening inside. Apparently the Interrogator's electric needles had failed to discharge any messages to Mao III. The Harvard Circle must have planned one sight, one reaction which would cue a synapse in the recesses of his brain, releasing the message to his conscious mind. It seemed obvious whom he was being taken to see, face to face.

His pulse was racing as if his body expected to be cued to violent action. If there was a message in his skull, Dr. West thought it must be a dandy to justify the maneuvers of the Harvard Circle.

Again, he remembered the blue eyes of the Major widening. *Good God,* the Major's voice cried. *What was intended for me?*

Dr. West began to shiver uncontrollably. He wanted to jump off the cart. The smiling faces closed in on him: Dr. George Bruning, Deputy Director of the C.I.A.; Dr. Sammy Wynoski, chemophychiatrist; Dr. Fred Gatson, bacteriologist; Dr. Einar Johansen, neurosurgeon. But there had been another member of the Harvard Circle.

Tom Randolph, a narrow-eyed man who chain-smoked cigarettes as if he had a death wish, had become a full professor of parapsychology at Duke University at age twenty-six. In the basement of C.I.A. headquarters, Dr. West had recognized Tom's off-kilter face. While Joe West had been a graduate medical student at Harvard, Tom Randolph had been the undergrad, who led the protest march which culminated in the dynamiting of the Quad.

The crazy kid should have ended in jail instead of as a Ph.D with his hands on millions of dollars of Defense Department money for extra sensory research.

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Surprisingly, Tom Randolph had resigned to take a seemingly less important position. This was with the Central Intelligence Agency when the President of the United States appointed fellow Harvard man George Bruning as Deputy Director.

To Dr. West, the memory of Tom Randolph's narrow eyes inspecting him as if he were as expendable as a bomb was terrifying.

"Mao III has a faith-healer," Tom Randolph's voice had rasped. "Remember, Joe, when we were young wise-guys at Harvard and you scared hell out of me at a drinking party. That's what turned me on extra-sensory research."

Dr. Joe West felt claustrophobia even tighter than when he was trapped in the aircraft capsule, and he tried to climb off the electric cart.

But they were too strong for him. The carved dragon doors opened, and the dwarfed man behind the huge desk glanced up. He wore a simple, agricultural commune costume.

"You are not Mao III," Dr. West's mouth immediately announced. "You are a double."

The man blinked and glanced at the Interrogator's shocked face. The Interrogator whirled, screaming at Dr. West that he was insulting the Chairman of the World, the Father of the Chinese Federation of Nations.

For a moment Dr. West experienced the weird feeling that he had been about to explode. The faces of the Harvard Circle, electric eels, Bio-Power, heavy legs, for those sons of bitches a bomb that walked like a man and was cued when he saw Mao III —

Another official appeared from a side door. "Quiet please. Clear the room. Your scheduled time is over. The room is needed."

The man behind the desk rose obediently and departed.

Even before the Interrogator was able to stop screaming, a third official appeared with soldiers. "Lieutenant, investigate this foreign prisoner's document-locator number. Update his Sparrow Folder and file in Pending."

Some afternoons Dr. West was taken from his cell to a waiting room. Through the swinging door to the main waiting room he glimpsed nervous men in Indonesian garb with briefcases and weary men in western suits who sat on benches day after day. Sometimes he recognized the Australian Premier. When janitors began sweeping the floor, the men with briefcases would file out and Dr. West would be taken back to his cell.

Once a Lieutenant peered through the bars: "Ah, I hoped

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I'd locate you eventually. According to records transferred from Szechuan Province, the 21-day incubation period for unknown infectious disease is over. Now you can be shot."

One sleeping period he was awakened, and a barber shaved him. Dr. West protested.

"This is the wrong time to go to the waiting room." After a month in the cell block, Dr. West tended to become irritable whenever the freedom of normal routine was disturbed.

An electric cart transported him to his waiting room and to his surprise into the main waiting room where the janitors were emptying the ash trays and on into the empty office with the large desk where he had last seen the Interrogator and on along a hall into a large-roomed apartment which was dim because the man was watching television.

At the end of the news program, the man switched off the T.V. set by remote control. "Is this Dr. Joseph West?"

"Yes, Chairman. His file has been placed on the tea table at your left hand."

"Some years ago when I still believed there was a purpose to be served by personally making speeches, I announced to the world that I wanted to meet you eye to eye, Dr. West. The implication then was that I would righteously tear you limb from limb. The occasion was my address to the United Nations General Assembly on the subject of the attempted genocide of the Eskimos by you and persons unknown, such as the United States government."

Dr. West made no attempt to answer. No message to Mao III from the Harvard Circle emerged from his mouth, but now Dr. George Bruning's voice was echoing in his memory: "Listen and observe, when Mao III or any man speaks of his strengths and beliefs; soon his contradictions and weaknesses will stick out like handles by which you can seize him."

Mao III stirred clumsily in his padded chair. Dr. West saw that Mao III was not wearing a simple commune costume. He was engulfed in an ornate black silk robe embroidered with a traditional dragon.

"Tonight while I was watching television coverage of the latest C.I.A. intruder aircraft to crash, I was reminded of an intelligence brief on my desk some months ago. This extrapolated a minimum of facts into a theory that a Dr. West had been delivered to China because I once had expressed a desire to meet him. This amused me at the time. It would be better for your Presi-

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dent to communicate with me directly. I am a busy man and cannot deal with minor intermediaries."

Dr. West observed the awkward position of Mao III's right wrist and left leg. Although Mao III was a comparatively young man, evidently he had suffered a paralytic stroke. Probably about three years ago when he vanished from the public eye.

"The intruder aircraft which crashed tonight was a converted passenger transport painted black," Mao III continued in his precise voice. "It contained an estimated 120 Eskimos, confined in a dozen large parachute ejection capsules. After the crash, the capsules saved many of the corpses from burning."

Dr. West straightened mentally, glimpsing the unknowable faces of the Harvard Circle. What was going on? 120 Eskimos murdered.

Mao III was saying: ". . . were to be parachuted into the mountainous region of Szechuan Province where our Dream Persons now comprise more than 90% of the population. The bodies of these Eskimos, or American Dream Persons, were dressed in commune costumes. They were equipped with machine pistols, plastic explosives, miniature radios and related equipment as if the C.I.A. intended that they organize guerrilla warfare. As my grandfather, Mao Tse-tung, often said: 'The guerrilla is the fish who swims among the people.' But to swim among our Dream Persons would be more frustrating."

Mao III laughed as if he liked to hear his own voice. "Times have changed since my grandfather was Chairman. He had no Dream Persons to perplex him. Surely you C.I.A. assassins do not really believe that American Eskimos or even a more sentient strain of American Dream Persons could arouse our Dream Persons."

This was a statement rather than a question. Like other leaders, Mao III had swept into a monologue. "It is not psychologically possible for Dream Persons to take the aggressive initiative necessary for revolution. Your Eskimos cannot arouse our Dream Persons because there is nothing to arouse. If your heavily armed corpses are not Eskimos, if they are American Dream Persons the joke is even stranger. This is like sending the blind to teach the blind how to see."

Dr. West felt physically ill, suspecting the black aircraft had been purposely crashed by the Harvard Circle. The planeload of Esks might be simply to remind the Chinese that the C.I.A's Esk

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expert was filed away somewhere in a Peking prison. Had those Harvard know-it-alls murdered 120 Esks as another little move in the attempt to place an American face to face with Mao III?

". . . Marxist-Maoists are anti-Malthusian," Mao III was saying, "because we have faith in mankind's ability to find new food supplies, new living space beneath the sea, new planets. There cannot be too many Chinese when there is so much work to be done. For the present, there cannot be too many Dream Persons. It is strange that the C.I.A. would send you to China. From the beginning you have had a closed mind concerning the Esks. Dr. West, what rational message could you possibly bring?"

Dr. West stood there swaying. He did not know. If the Harvard Circle had given him a message for Mao III, it was lost or buried too deep in his skull. He stood face to face with Mao III, and no message had been cued.

". . . Marxist-Maoist position regarding the origin of the Dream Person," Mao III was orating "is that the renewed thermonuclear testing by Russia in the Arctic during the 1970's caused the mutation. No other nation would have both the vicious deviationist

GALAXY

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disregard for human life and the technological clumsiness to explode weapons so unexpectedly filthy with radioactive cesium."

This cued the one-track in Dr. West's mind. "The mutation theory has no basis in fa —"

"The lichens, the little plants on Arctic rocks, were contaminated with radioactive cesium," Mao III's voice swept on emotionally, drowning Dr. West's voice. "The lichens were like rice to the herds of caribou, and radioactive cesium concentrated in certain organs of these extinct beasts who were eaten by the Eskimos, who are an Oriental People. Don't tell me there was no mutation!"

Mao III gasped for breath, evidently emotionally involved with his interpretation of the Esks. "The most important mutation in the world took place on the Boothia Peninsula in the Canadian Northwest Territories. An oriental child was born."

"Even though there were not Three Wise Men in attendance, even though no angels sang," Mao III laughed breathlessly, "the metabolism of this child was at least three times as efficient, and he matured in one fifth as many years as other children. Whenever this precocious Eskimo mated, from each conception to the time of birth was only a month."

Near Mao III's right hand

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gleamed a glass of water. He looked at it longingly. "The rapid multiplication of these Dream Persons has proved vital to the rightful growth of the Chinese Federation of Nations. My original decision to rescue the Eskimos from imperialist genocide has been proven correct."

Mao III's right hand jerked, and he stared at Dr. West. "I recall from the United Nations discussions of ten years ago, your own theory of the origin of that first Dream Person was more unlikely and — sinister.

"I was the first; I was encamped on the Boothia Peninsula within five years after the event took place." Dr. West spoke quickly. "I interviewed the Eskimos who —"

"There is no need for you to defend your theory," Mao III interrupted. "You have attempted to justify your mass murder on many occasions. I, for one, would be equally disturbed if I believed your theory."

Mao III's right hand made a tentative movement toward the glass of water. "At the present time it is to the advantage of the Chinese Federation of Nations to breed several billion more Dream Persons at the very least."

"And drown the world!"

"Are you worried about the disappearance of hairy, Anglo-Saxon man? Because the Dream Person's traits invariably are dominant?" Mao III laughed. "Perhaps the world would be a happier and more peaceful place if all peoples were absorbed by the Dream Persons? Are you sure there is not already a political splinter group in the United States which has decided I am a Dream Person, a degenerate Eskimo? It is not true. Dream Persons are remarkably unqualified for the violent leadership that is necessary in the world today."

Awkwardly, Mao III's paralyzed right hand attempted to reach the glass. "The Chinese people and all the peace-loving peoples of the world know that the vicious racist American propaganda campaign is to delude the Chinese Federation of Nations into giving up our greatest source of economic growth, the Dream Persons!"

Dr. West watched the shivering hand. Instinctively, because he was a fellow human being his eyes wanted Mao III's hand to be able to reach, to grasp the glass of water.

"Ah!" Mao III proudly clutched the glass in his hand. Shuddering, he raised it to his lips.

When he had finished, an attendant stepped from the shadows to take the glass. "No, no," Mao III coughed, "This time, this time I will not drop it."

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Dr. West's eyes concentrated on the cautiously moving hand on its long journey with the empty glass down toward the table. The glass clunked on the table.

"Ah! You see I am making great improvement. Until tonight I always broke the glass. I am informed you originally were a medical doctor who attempted to save lives rather than destroy them? If so, you will understand the importance in my condition of such a sudden improvement. It was as if a voice in my head was telling my hand to move downward. Amazingly, my hand obeyed. No doubt new nerve wires have been growing as my doctors promised, growing past the dead spot in my brain, and tonight contact is made! Look at this. I am going to raise my arm. Soon, you will see, soon I will stand before the people again. I will astound the world with my words. This is the greatest moment in history of the world!"

IX

While Dr. West's eyes watched, Mao III tried to stand up.

"I am standing!"

Fall, you big-mouthed, little tyrant! Dr. West thought.

Mao III pitched forward, upsetting the table and glass. Attendants sprang from the shadows to assist Mao III. A soldier's hand closed on Dr. West's elbow to lead him from the room.

Tell them to leave me alone! Dr. West thought.

"Leave him alone," Mao III gasped.

Tell them to bring me a chair!

"Bring him a chair." Mao III collapsed on his couch.

Dr. West sat down. His heavy legs were twitching, and he was reminded of Galvani's early experiments with electricity and a frog's legs. His legs tingled. His face felt numb with shock.

Those incredible Harvard medicine men! Heavy legs, electric eels, biopower, parapsychology, this was why they had connived to maneuver an American into close proximity with the Chairman of the Chinese Federation of Nations, the ruler of four fifths of the population of the world. Within how many feet of Mao III did he have to remain?

Dr. West was afraid he was a poor choice. Had the Harvard Circle selected him because Mao III once said he wanted to meet Dr. West eye to eye? Dr. West knew he was a helluva choice.

When he was a med student at Harvard, Joe West had irritated Sammy Wynoski. "That's not ESP, Joe. That's a parlor trick." But Joe West had possessed a certain empathy and power of

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suggestion that sometimes extended its corona to more imaginative and gullible persons such as undergrad Tom Randolph.

Professor Tom Randolph's experiments at Duke University in which one soldier attempted to control another hadn't satisfied the Defense Department. Now Dr. West remembered Tom Randolph's excuse. "A human's biopower to broadcast his thoughts through his neuron-electrical system is simply too weak."

But a man with biological batteries as powerful as an electric eel's installed in his swollen legs, Dr. West thought, such a man from a close distance . . . *Tell them to bring me a glass of water.*

"Bring him a glass of water," Mao III murmured hollowly from his couch.

Because there were no peculiar reactions from the other Chinese in the room, Dr. West concluded that he had been neatly conditioned to direct his control at only one man — Mao III.

Tell them to prepare a couch for me. Tell them you believe I have a healing power. When I am near you, your paralysis is cured.

When the water was brought, Dr. West was afraid to drink. It might be poisoned. He knew he would have to suppress such fears. Now every move would be into the unknown.

When the couch was brought, Dr. West was afraid to sleep. What was going on in Mao III's head? The man had not spoken or moved since —

"I move. I speak," Mao III said. "What do you wish to speak about?"

Sleep until I awaken you. Dr. West lay there staring up at the triumphantly grinning faces of the Harvard Circle.

Dr. George Bruning, boy wonder, geophysicist, astronaut, political climber, and buddy of the President.

Dr. Sam Wynoski, chemopsychiatrist.

Dr. Fred Gatson, bacteriologist and ladder climber.

Dr. Einar Johansen, neurosurgeon and electric eel fancier.

Dr. Tom Randolph, parapsychologist.

You C.I.A. master minds, Dr. West thought so gently that Mao III did not awaken, you've succeeded in planting your man in Peking.

But am I your man? You may have implanted general guidelines in my skull such as "love America." But you could never prepare me for all the quick and unexpected decisions a new dictator must make. I have a feeling I am free now — to do what I want. Soon we'll find out.

HAYDEN HOWARD

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Like any pinball machine, the fun was in trying to beat it. But like no other, it was trying to beat you too!

Return Match

by PHILIP K. DICK

It was not an ordinary gambling casino. And this, for the police of S.L.A., posed a special problem. The outspacers who had set up the casino had placed their massive ship directly above the tables, so that in the event of a raid the jets would destroy the tables. Efficient, officer Joseph Tinbane thought to himself morosely. With one blast the outspacers left Terra and simultaneously destroyed all evidence of their illegal activity.

And, what was more, killed each and every human gameplayer who might otherwise have lived to give testimony.

He sat now in his parked aircar, taking pinch after pinch of fine imported Dean Swift inchkenneth snuff, then switched to the yellow tin which contained wren's relish. The snuff cheered him, but not very much. To his left, in the evening darkness, he could make out the shape of the outspacers' upended ship, black and silent, with the enlarged walled space beneath it, equally dark and silent — but deceptively so.

"We can go in there," he said to his less experienced companion officer, "but it'll just mean getting killed." We'll have to trust the robots, he realized. Even if they are clumsy, prone to error. Anyhow they're not alive. And not being alive, in a

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project as this, constituted an advantage.

"The third has gone in," officer Falkes beside him said quietly.

The slim shape, in human clothing, stopped before the door of the casino, rapped, waited. Presently the door opened. The robot gave the proper code-word and was admitted.

"You think they'll survive the take-off blast?" Tinbane asked. Falkes was an expert in robotics.

"Possibly one might. Not all, though. But one will be enough." Hot for the kill, officer Falkes leaned to peer past Tinbane; his youthful face was fixed in concentration. "Use the bull-horn now. Tell them they're under arrest. I see no point in waiting."

"The point I see," Tinbane said, "is that it's more comforting to see the ship inert and the action going on underneath. We'll wait."

"But no more robots are coming."

"Wait for them to send back their vid transmissions," Tinbane said. After all, that comprised evidence — of a sort. And at police HQ it was now being recorded in permanent form. Still, his companion officer assigned to this project did have a point. Since the last of the three humanoid plants had gone in, nothing more would take place, now. Until the outspacers realized they had been infiltrated and put their typical planned pattern of withdrawal into action. "All right," he said, and pushed down on the button which activated the bull-horn.

Leaning, Falkes spoke into the bull-horn. At once the bull-horn said, "AS ORDER-REPRESENTATIVES OF SUPERIOR LOS ANGELES I AND THE MEN WITH ME INSTRUCT EVERYONE INSIDE TO COME OUT ONTO THE STREET COLLECTIVELY; I FURTHER INSTRUCT —"

His voice, from the bull-horn, disappeared as the initial take-off surge roared through the primary jets of the outspacers' ship. Falkes shrugged, grinned starkly at Tinbane. *It didn't take them long,* his mouth formed silently.

As expected no one came out. No one in the casino escaped. Even when the structure which composed the building melted. The ship detached itself, leaving a soggy, puddled mass of wax-like matter behind it. And still no one emerged.

All dead, Tinbane realized with mute shock.

"Time to go in," Falkes said stoically. He began to crawl into his neoasbestos suit, and, after a pause, so did Tinbane.

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Together, the two officers entered the hot, dripping puddle which had been the casino. In the center, forming a mound, lay two of the three humanoid robots; they had managed at the last moment to cover something with their bodies. Of the third Tinbane saw no sign; evidently it had been demolished along with everything else. Everything organic.

I wonder what they thought — in their own dim way — to be worth preserving, Tinbane thought as he surveyed the distorted remnants of the two robots. Something alive? One of the snail-like outspacers? Probably not. A gaming table, then.

"They acted fast," Falkes said, impressed. "For robots."

"But we got something," Tinbane pointed out. Gingerly, he poked at the hot fused metal which had been the two robots. A section, most likely a torso, slid aside, revealed what the robots had preserved.

A pinball machine.

Tinbane wondered why. What was this worth? Anything? Personally, he doubted it.

In the police lab on Sunset Avenue in downtown Old Los Angeles, a technician presented a long written analysis to Tinbane.

"Tell me orally," Tinbane said, annoyed; he had been too many years on the force to suffer through such stuff. He returned the clipboard and report to the tall, lean police technician.

"Actually it's not an ordinary construct," the technician said, glancing over his own report, as if he had already forgotten it; his tone, like the report itself, was dry, dull. This for him was obviously routine. He, too, agreed that the pinball machine salvaged by the humanoid robots was worthless — or so Tinbane guessed. "By that I mean it's not like any they've brought to Terra in the past. You can probably get more of an idea directly from the thing; I suggest you put a quarter in it and play through a game." He added, "The lab budget will provide you with a quarter which we'll retrieve from the machine later."

"I've got my own quarter," Tinbane said irritably. He followed the technician through the large, overworked lab, past the elaborate — and in many cases obsolete — assortment of analytical devices and partly broken-apart constructs to the work area in the rear.

There, cleaned up, the damage done to it now repaired, stood the pinball machine which the robots had protected. Tinbane inserted a coin; five metal balls at once spilled into the reservoir, and the board at the far end of

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the machine lit up in a variety of shifting colors.

"Before you shoot the first ball," the technician said to him, standing beside him so that he, too, could watch, "I advise you to take a careful look at the terrain of the machine, the components among which the ball will pass. The horizontal area beneath the protective glass is somewhat interesting. A miniature village, complete with houses, lighted streets, major public buildings, overhead sprintship runnels . . . not a Terran village, of course. An Ionian village, of the sort they're used to. The detail work is superb."

Bending, Tinbane peered. The technician was right; the detail work on the scale-model structures astounded him.

"Tests that measure wear on the moving parts of this machine," the technician informed him, "indicate that it saw a great deal of use. There is considerable tolerance. We estimate that before another thousand games could be completed, the machine would have to go to the shop. *Their* shop, back on Io. Which is where we understand they build and maintain equipment of this variety." He explained, "By that I mean gambling layouts in general."

"What's the object of the game?" Tinbane asked.

"We have here," the technician explained, "what we call a full-shift set variable. In other words, the terrain through which the steel ball moves is never the same. The number of possible combinations is —" he leafed through his report but was unable to find the exact figure — "anyhow, quite great. In the millions. It's excessively intricate, in our opinion. Anyhow, if you'll release the first ball you'll see."

Depressing the plunger, Tinbane allowed the first ball to roll from the reservoir and against the impulse-shaft. He then drew back the springloaded shaft and snapped it into release. The ball shot up the channel and bounced free, against a pressure-cushion which imparted swift additional velocity to it.

The ball now dribbled in descent, toward the upper perimeter of the village.

"The initial defense line," the technician said from behind him, "which protects the village proper, is a series of mounds colored, shaped and surfaced to resemble the Ionian landscape. The fidelity is quite obviously painstaking. Probably made from satellites in orbit around Io. You can easily imagine you're seeing an actual piece of that moon from a distance of ten or more miles up."

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The steel ball encountered the perimeter of rough terrain. Its trajectory altered, and the ball wobbled uncertainly, no longer going in any particular direction.

"Deflected," Tinbane said, noting how satisfactorily the contours of the terrain acted to deprive the ball of is descending forward motion. "It's going to bypass the village entirely."

The ball, with severely decreased momentum, wandered into a side crease, followed the crease listlessly, and then, just as it appeared to be drifting into the lower take-up slot, abruptly hurtled from a pressure-cushion and back into play.

On the illuminated backboard a score registered. Victory, of a momentary sort, for the player. The ball once again menaced the village. Once again it dribbled through the rough terrain, following virtually the same path as before.

"Now you'll notice something moderately important," the technician said. "As it heads toward that same pressure-cushion which it just now hit. Don't watch the ball; watch the cushion."

Tinbane watched. And saw, from the cushion, a tiny wisp of gray smoke. He turned inquiringly toward the technician.

"Now watch the ball!" the technician said sharply.

Again the ball struck the pressure-cushion mounted slightly before the lower take-up slot. This time, however, the cushion failed to react to the ball's impact.

Tinbane blinked as the ball rolled harmlessly on, into the take-up slot and out of play.

"Nothing happened," he said presently.

"That smoke that you saw. Emerging from the wiring of the cushion. An electrical short. Because a rebound from that spot placed the ball in a menacing position — menacing to the village."

"In other words," Tinbane said, "something took note of the effect the cushion was having on the ball. The assembly operates so as to protect itself from the ball's activity." He had seen this before, in other outspacer gambling gear: sophisticated circuitry which kept the gameboard constantly shifting in such a way as to seem alive — in such a way as to reduce the chances of the player winning. On this particular construct the player obtained a winning score by inducing the five steel balls to pass into the central layout: the replica of the Ionian hamlet. Hence the hamlet had to be protected. Hence this particular strategically located pressure-clushion required elimination. At least for the time being. Until the overall configura-

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tions of topography altered decidedly.

"Nothing new there," the technician said. "You've seen it a dozen times before; I've seen it a hundred times before. Let's say that this pinball machine has seen ten thousand separate games, and each time there's been a careful readjustment of the circuitry directed toward rendering the steel balls neutralized. Let's say that the alterations are cumulative. So by now any given player's score is probably no more than a fraction of early scores, before the circuits had a chance to react. The direction of alteration — as in all outspacer gambling mechanisms — has a zero win factor as the limit toward which it's moving. Just *try* to hit the village, Tinbane. We set up a constantly repeating mechanical ball-release and played one hundred and forty games. At no time did a ball ever get near enough to do the village any harm. We kept a record of the scores obtained. A slight but significant drop was registered each time." He grinned.

"So?" Tinbane said.

"So nothing. As I told you and as my report says." The technician paused, then. "Except for one thing. Look at this."

Bending, he traced his thin finger across the protective glass of the layout, toward a construct near the center of the replica village. A photographic record shows that with each game that particular component becomes more articulated. It's being erected by circuitry underneath — obviously. As is every other change. But this configuration — doesn't it remind you of something?"

"Looks like a Roman catapult," Tinbane said. "But with a vertical rather than a horizontal axis."

"That's our reaction, too. And look at the sling. In terms of the scale of the village it's inordinately large. Immense, in fact; specifically, *it's not to scale.*"

"It looks as if it would almost hold —"

"Not almost," the technician said. "We measured it. The size of the sling is exact; one of those steel balls would fit perfectly into it."

"And then?" Tinbane said, feeling chill.

"And then it would hurl the ball back at the player," the lab technician said calmly. "It's aimed directly toward the front of the machine, front and upward." He added, "And it's been virtually completed."

The best defense, Tinbane thought to himself as he

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studied the outspacers' illegal pinball machine, is offense. But whoever heard of it in this context?

Zero, he realized, isn't a low enough score to suit the defensive circuitry of the thing. Zero won't do. It's got to strive for less than zero. Why? Because, he decided, it's not really moving toward zero as a limit; it's moving, instead, toward the best defensive pattern. It's too well designed.

Or is it?

"You think," he asked the lean, tall lab technician, "that the outspacers intended this?"

"That doesn't matter. At least not from the immediate standpoint. What matters is two factors: the machine was exported — in violation of Terran law — to Terra, and it's been played by Terrans. Intentionally or not, this could be, in fact will soon be, a lethal weapon." He added, "We calculate within the next twenty games. Every time a coin is inserted, the building resumes. Whether a ball gets near the village or not. All it requires is a flow of power from the device's central helium battery. And that's automatic, once play begins." He added, "It's at work building the catapult right now, as we stand here. You better release the remaining four balls, so it'll shut itself off. Or give us permission to dismantle it — to at least take the power-supply out of the circuit."

"The outspacers don't have a very high regard for human life," Tinbane reflected. He was thinking of the carnage created by the ship taking off. And that, for them, was routine. But in view of that wholesale destruction of human life, this seemed unnecessary. What more did this accomplish?

Pondering, he said, "This is selective. This would eliminate only the game-player."

The technician said, "This would eliminate *every* game-player. One after another."

"But who would play the thing," Tinbane said, "after the first fatality?"

"People go there knowing that if there's a raid the outspacers will burn up everyone and everything," the technician pointed out. "The urge to gamble is an addictive compulsion; a certain type of person gambles no matter what the risk is. You ever hear of Russian Roulette?"

Tinbane released the second steel ball, watched it bounce and wander toward the replica village. This one managed to pass through the rough terrain; it approached the first house comprising the village proper. Maybe I'll get it, he thought savagely. Before it gets me. A strange,

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novel excitement filled him as he watched the ball thud against the tiny house, flatten the structure and roll on. The ball, although small to him, towered over every building, every structure, that made up the village.

— Every structure except the central catapult. He watched avidly as the ball moved dangerously close to the catapult, then, deflected by a major public building, rolled on and disappeared into the take-up slot. Immediately he sent the third ball hurtling up its channel.

"The stakes," the lab technician said softly, "are high, aren't they? Your life against its. Must be exceptionally appealing to someone with the right kind of temperament."

"I think," Tinbane said, "I can get the catapult before it's in action."

"Maybe. Maybe not."

"I'm getting the ball closer to it each time."

The technician said, "For the catapult to work, it requires one of the steel balls; that's its load. You're making it increasingly likely that it'll acquire use of one of the balls. You're actually helping it." He added somberly, "In fact it can't function without you; the gameplayer is not only the enemy, he's also essential. Better quit, Tinbane. The thing is using you."

"I'll quit," Tinbane said, "when I've gotten the catapult."

"You're damn right you will. You'll be dead." He eyed Tinbane narrowly. "Possibly this is why the outspacers built it. To get back at us for our raids. This very likely is what it's for."

"Got another quarter?" Tinbane said.

In the middle of his tenth game a surprising, unexpected alteration in the machine's strategy manifested itself. All at once it ceased routing the steel balls entirely to one side, away from the replica village.

Watching, Tinbane saw the steel ball roll directly — for the first time — through the center. Straight toward the proportionally massive catapult.

Obviously the catapult had been completed.

"I outrank you, Tinbane," the lab technician said tautly. "And I'm ordering you to quit playing."

"Any order from you to me," Tinbane said, "has to be in writing and has to be approved by someone in the department at inspector level." But, reluctantly, he halted play. "I can get it," he said reflectively, "but not standing here. I have to be away, far enough back so that it can't pick me off." So it can't distinguish me and aim, he realized.

Already he had noted it swivel

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slightly. Through some lens-system it had detected him. Or possibly it was thermotropic, had sensed him by his body heat.

If the latter, then defensive action for him would be relatively simple: a resistance coil suspended at another locus. On the other hand it might be utilizing a cephalic index of some sort, recording all nearby brain-emanations. But the police lab would know that already.

"What's its tropism?" he asked.

The technician said. "That assembly hadn't been built up, at the time we inspected it. It's undoubtedly coming into existence now, in concert with the completion of the weapon."

Tinbane said thoughtfully, "I hope it doesn't possess equipment to *record* a cephalic index." Because, he thought, if it did, storing the pattern would be no trouble at all. It could retain a memory of its adversary for use in the event of future encounters.

Something about that notion frightened him — over and above the immediate menace of the situation.

"I'll make a deal," the technician said. "You continue to operate it until it fires its initial shot at you. Then step aside and let us tear it down. We need to know its tropism; this may turn up again in a more complex fashion. You agree? You'll be taking a calculated risk, but I believe its initial shot will be aimed with the idea of use as feedback; it'll correct for a second shot . . . which will never take place."

Should he tell the technician his fear?

"What bothers me," he said, "is the possibility that it'll retain a specific memory of me. For future purposes."

"What future purposes? It'll be completely torn down. As soon as it fires."

Reluctantly, Tinbane said, "I think I'd better make the deal." I may already have gone too far, he thought. You may have been right.

The next steel ball missed the catapult by only a matter of a fraction of an inch. But what unnerved him was not the closeness; it was the quick, subtle attempt on the part of the catapult to snare the ball as it passed. A motion so rapid that he might easily have overlooked it.

"It wants that ball," the technician observed. "It wants *you*." He, too, had seen.

With hesitation, Tinbane touched the plunger which would release the next — and for him possibly the last — steel ball.

"Back out," the technician advised nervously. "Forget the deal;

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stop playing. We'll tear it down as it is."

"We need the tropism," Tinbane said. And depressed the plunger.

The steel ball, suddenly seeming to him huge and hard and heavy, rolled unhesitatingly into the waiting catapult; every contour of the machine's topography collaborated. The acquisition of the load took place before he even understood what had happened. He stood staring.

"Run!" The technician leaped back, bolted; crashing against Tinbane, he threw him bodily away from the machine.

With a clatter of broken glass the steel ball shot by Tinbane's right temple, bounced against the far wall of the lab, came to rest under a work table.

Silence.

After a time the technician said shakily, "It had plenty of velocity. Plenty of mass. Plenty of what it needed."

Haltingly, Tinbane stood up, took a step toward the machine.

"Don't release another ball," the technician said warningly.

Tinbane said, "I don't have to." He turned, then, sprinted away.

The machine had released the ball itself.

In the outer office, Tinbane sat smoking, seated across from Ted Donovan, the lab chief. The door to the lab had been shut, and every one of the several lab technicians had been bull-horned to safety. Beyond the closed door the lab was silent. Inert, Tinbane thought, and waiting.

He wondered if it was waiting for anyone, any human, any Terran, to come within reach. Or — just him.

The latter thought amused him even less than it had originally; even seated out here he felt himself cringe. A machine built on another world, sent to Terra empty of direction, merely capable of sorting among all its defensive possibilities until at last it stumbled onto the key. Randomness at work, through hundreds, even thousands of games . . . through person after person, player after player. Until at last it reached critical direction, and the last person to play it, also selected by the process of randomness, became welded to it in a contract of death. In this case, himself. Unfortunately.

Ted Donovan said, "We'll spear its power source from a distance; that shouldn't be hard. You go on home, forget about it. When we have its tropic circuit laid out we'll notify you. Unless of course it's late at night, in which case —"

"Notify me," Tinbane said, "whatever time it is. If you will."

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He did not have to explain; the lab chief understood.

"Obviously," Donovan said, "this construct is aimed at the police teams raiding the casinos. How they steered our robots onto it we don't of course know — yet. We may find *that* circuit, too." He picked up the already extant lab report, eyed it with hostility. "This was far too cursory, it would now appear. 'Just another outspacer gambling device.' The hell it is." He tossed the report away, disgusted.

"If that's what they had in mind," Tinbane said, "they got what they wanted; they got me completely." At least in terms of hooking him. Of snaring his attention. And his *cooperation*.

"You're a gambler; you've got the streak. But you didn't know it. Possibly it wouldn't have worked otherwise." Donovan added, "but it is interesting. A pinball machine that fights back. That gets fed up with steel balls rolling over it. I hope they don't build a skeet-shoot. This is bad enough."

"Dreamlike," Tinbane murmured.

"Pardon?"

"Not really real." But, he thought, it is real. He rose, then, to his feet. "I'll do what you say; I'll go on home to my conapt. You have the vidphone number." He felt tired and afraid.

"You look terrible," Donovan said, scrutinizing him. "It shouldn't get you to this extent; this is a relatively benign construct, isn't it? You have to attack it, to set it in motion. If left alone —"

"I'm leaving it alone," Tinbane said. "But I feel it's waiting. It wants me to come back." He felt it expecting him, anticipating his return. The machine was capable of learning and he had taught it — taught it about himself.

Taught it that he existed. That there was such a person on Terra as Joseph Tinbane.

And that was too much.

When he unlocked the door of his conapt the phone was already ringing. Leadenly, he picked up the receiver. "Hello," he said.

"Tinbane?" It was Donovan's voice. "It's encephalotropic, all right. We found a pattern-print of your brain configuration, and of course we destroyed it. But—" Donovan hesitated. "We also found something else it had constructed since the initial analysis."

"A transmitter," Tinbane said hoarsely.

"Afraid so. Half-mile of broadcast, two miles if beamed. And it was cupped to beam, so we have to assume the two-mile

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transmission. We have absolutely no idea what the receiver consists of, naturally, whether it's even on the surface or not. Probably is. In an office somewhere. Or a hover-car such as they use. Anyhow, now you know. So it's decidedly a vengeance weapon; your emotional response was unfortunately correct. When our double-dome experts looked this over they drew the conclusion that you were waited-for, so to speak. It saw you coming. The instrument may never have functioned as an authentic gambling device in the first place; the tolerances which we noted may have been built in, rather than the result of wear. So that's about it."

Tinbane said, "What do you suggest I do?"

"'Do'?" A pause. "Not much. Stay in your conapt; don't report for work, not for a while."

So if they nail me, Tinbane thought, no one else in the department will get hit at the same time. More advantageous for the rest of you; hardly for me, though. "I think I'll get out of the area," he said aloud. "The structure may be limited in space, confined to S.L.A. or just one part of the city. If you don't veto it." He had a girl friend, Nancy Hackett, in La Jolla; he could go there.

"Suit yourself."

He said, "You can't do anything to help me, though."

"I tell you what," Donovan said. "We'll allocate some funds, a moderate sum, best we can, on which you can function. Until we track down the damn receiver and find out what it's tied to. For us, the main headache is that word of this matter has begun to filter through the department. It's going to be hard getting crack-down teams to tackle future outspacer gambling operations . . . which of course is specifically what they had in mind. One more thing we can do. We can have the lab build you a brain-shield so you no longer emanate a recognizable template. But you'd have to pay for it out of your own pocket. Possibly it could be debited against your salary, payments divided over several months. If you're interested. Frankly, if you want my personal opinion, I'd advise it."

"All right," Tinbane said. He felt dull, dead, tired and resigned; all of those at once. And he had the deep and acute intuition that his reaction was rational. "Anything else you suggest?" he asked.

"Stay armed. Even when you're asleep."

"What asleep?" he said. "You think I'm going to get any sleep? Maybe I will after that machine

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is totally destroyed." But that won't make any difference, he realized. Not now. Not after it's dispatched my brain-wave pattern to something else, something we know nothing about. God knows what equipment it might turn out to be; outspacers show up with all kinds of convoluted things.

He hung up the phone, walked into his kitchen, and, getting down a half-empty fifth of Antique bourbon, fixed himself a whiskey sour.

What a mess, he said to himself. Pursued by a pinball machine from another world. He almost — but not quite — had to laugh.

What do you use, he asked himself, to catch an angry pinball machine? One that has your number and is out to get you? Or more specifically, a pinball machine's nebulous friend . . .

Something went *tap tap* against the kitchen window.

Reaching into his pocket he brought out his regulation-issue laser pistol; walking along the kitchen wall he approached the window from an unseen side, peered out into the night. Darkness. He could make nothing out. Flashlight? He had one in the glove compartment of his aircar, parked on the roof of the conapt building. Time to get it.

A moment later, flashlight in hand, he raced downstairs, back to his kitchen.

The beam of the flashlight showed, pressed against the outer surface of the window, a buglike entity with projecting elongated pseudopodia. The two feelers had tapped against the glass of the window, evidently exploring in their blind, mechanical way.

The bug-thing had ascended the side of the building; he could perceive the suction-tread by which it clung.

His curiosity, at this point, became greater than his fear. With care he opened the window — no need of having to pay the building repair committee for it — and cautiously took aim with his laser pistol. The bug-thing did not stir; evidently it had stalled in midcycle. Probably its responses, he guessed, were relatively slow, much more so than a comparable organic equivalent. Unless, of course, it was set to detonate; in which case he had no time to ponder.

He fired a narrow-beam into the underside of the bug-thing.

Maimed, the bug-thing settled backward, its many little cups releasing their hold. As it fell away, Tinbane caught hold of it, lifted it swiftly into the room, dropped it onto the floor, meantime keeping his pistol pointed at it. But

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it was finished functionally; it did not stir.

Laying it on the small kitchen table he got a screwdriver from the tool-drawer beside the sink, seated himself, examined the object. He felt, now, that he could take his time; the pressure, momentarily at least, had abated.

It took him forty minutes to get the thing open; none of the holding screws fitted an ordinary screwdriver, and he found himself at last using a common kitchen knife. But finally he had it open before him on the table, its shell divided into two parts: one hollow and empty, the other crammed with components. A bomb? He tinkered with exceeding care, inspecting each assembly bit by bit.

No bomb — at least none which he could identify. Then a murder tool? No blade, no toxins or micro-organisms, no tube capable of expelling a lethal charge, explosive or otherwise. So then what in God's name did it do? He recognized the motor which had driven it up the side of the building, then the photo-electric steering turret by which it oriented itself. But that was all. Absolutely all.

From the standpoint of use, it was a fraud.

Or was it? He examined his watch. Now he had spent an entire hour on it; his attention had been diverted from everything else — and who knew what that else might be?

Nervously, he slid stiffly to his feet, collected his laser pistol, and prowled throughout the apartment, listening, wondering, trying to sense something, however small, that was out of its usual order.

It's giving them time, he realized. One entire hour! For whatever it is they're *really* up to.

Time, he thought, for me to leave the apartment. To get to La Jolla and the hell out of here, until this is all over with.

His vidphone rang.

When he answered it, Ted Donovan's face clicked grayly into view. "We've got a department aircar monitoring your conapt building," Donovan said. "And it picked up some activity; I thought you'd want to know."

"Okay," he said tensely.

"A vehicle, airborne, landed briefly on your roof parking lot. Not a standard aircar but something larger. Nothing we could recognize. It took right off again at great speed, but I think this is it."

"Did it deposit anything?" he asked.

"Yes. Afraid so."

Tight-lipped, he said, "Can you do anything for me at this

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late point? It would be appreciated very much."

"What do you suggest? We don't know what it is; you certainly don't know either. We're open to ideas, but I think we'll have to wait until you know the nature of the — hostile artifact."

Something bumped against his door. Something in the hall.

"I'll leave the line open," Tinbane said. "Don't leave; I think it's happening now." He felt panic, at this stage; overt, childish panic. Carrying his laser pistol in a numb, loose grip he made his way step by step to the locked front door of his conapt, halted, then unlocked the door and opened it. Slightly. As little as he could manage.

An enormous, unchecked force pushed the door further; the knob left his hand. And, soundlessly, the vast steel ball resting against the halfopen door rolled forward. He stepped aside — he had to — knowing that this was the adversary; the dummy wall-climbing gadget had deflected his attention from this.

He could not get out. He would not be going to La Jolla now. The great massed sphere totally blocked the way.

Returning to the vidphone he said to Donovan, "I'm encapsulated. Here in my own conapt." At the outer perimeter, he realized. Equal to the rough terrain of the pinball machine's shifting landscape. The first ball has been blocked there, has lodged in the doorway. But what about the second? The third?

Each would be closer.

"Can you build something for me?" he asked huskily. "Can the lab start working this late at night?"

"We can try," Donovan said. "It depends entirely on what you want. What you have in mind? What do you think would help?"

He hated to ask for it. But he had to. The next one might burst in through a window, or crash onto him from the roof. "I want," he said, "some form of catapult. Big enough, tough enough, to handle a spherical load with a diameter of between four and a half and five feet. You think you can manage it?" He prayed to god they could.

"Is that what you're facing?" Donovan said harshly.

"Unless it's an hallucination," Tinbane said. "A deliberate, artificially induced terror-projection, designed specifically to demoralize me."

"The department aircar saw something," Donovan said. "And it wasn't an hallucination; it had measurable mass. And —" He hesitated. "It did leave off something big. Its departing mass was considerably diminished. So it's real, Tinbane."

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"That's what I thought," Tinbane said.

"We'll get the catapult to you as soon as we possibly can," Donovan said. "Let's hope there's an adequate interval between each — attack. And you better figure on five at least."

Tinbane, nodding lit a cigarette, or at least tried to. But his hands were shaking too badly to get the lighter into place. He then got out a yellow-lacquered tin of dean's own snuff, but found himself unable to force open the tight tin; the tin hopped from his fingers and fell to the floor. "Five," he said, "*per game*."

"Yes," Donovan said reluctantly, "there's that."

The wall of the living room shuddered.

The next one was coming at him from the adjoining apartment. —PHILIP K. DICK

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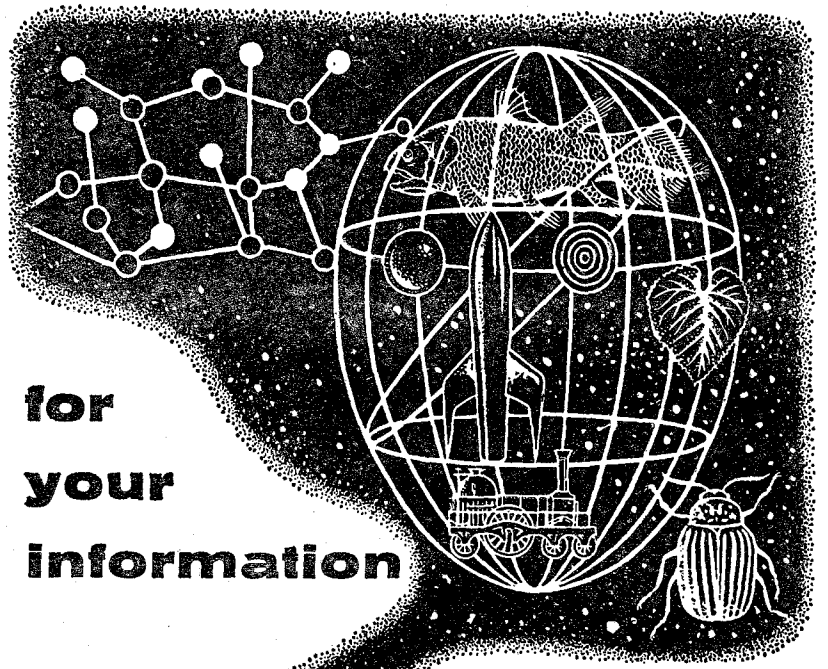

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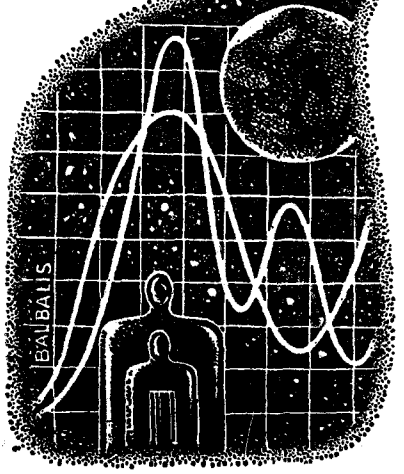

WHO INVENTED THE CROSSBOW?

It is simply impossible to find an article on crossbows or medieval warfare that neglects to mention that the Second Lateran Council, in 1139, forbade the use of the crossbow to Christians — except for hunting or against infidels — and that Pope Innocentius III, later in the same century,

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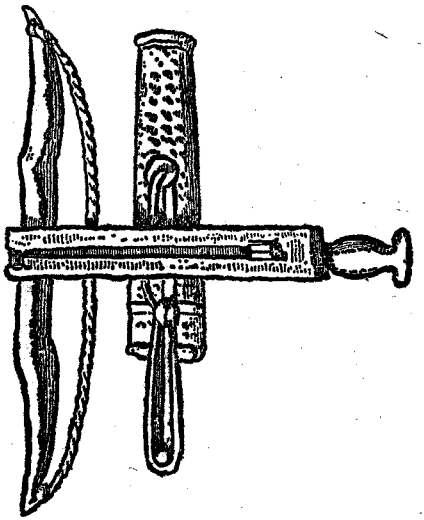

Fig. 1. *Picture of a crossbow from a Roman grave in France.*

reaffirmed this *prohibitus est.* British writers, as a rule, add the information that the crossbow was introduced in England in 1066 by the invading Normans, but that it never became as popular in England as it was on the continent.

While saying all this, most writers create the impression — and seem to be under that impression themselves — that the crossbow must have been a fairly recent invention at the time the Lateran Council adjourned. Since it is certain that crossbows existed at a much earlier time, it is logical to assume that the weapon achieved a sudden surge in popularity around the year 1100, leading to ecclesiastical measures. Such sudden surges are usually the result of an improvement of some kind, and the most likely improvement for that period was the introduction of a steel bow instead of a wooden bow.

If the older crossbows had wooden bows, they either had to be so large as to be unwieldy or, if small enough, both their range and their penetrating power must have been inferior to the normal bow. As a matter of fact British writers have occasionally wondered in print why the crossbow became popular at all. Even at the height of its development a crossbow bolt did not carry much

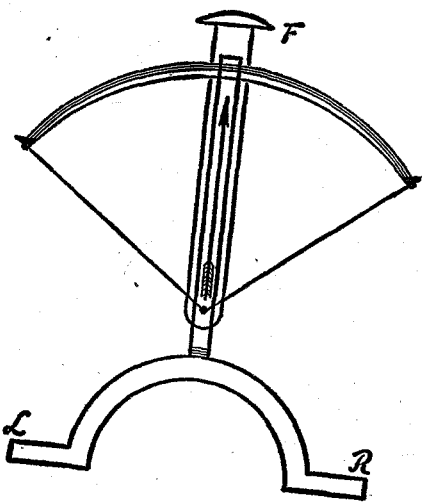

Fig. 2. The Greek *gastrophetes*, oldest known picture of a crossbow.

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farther than an arrow from a longbow, and both could penetrate a shield that a man could carry. Moreover, a good longbow man could get off ten arrows in the time a crossbow man could shoot three bolts. All true; but a man who had never used a crossbow would be a good shot after three weeks of five hours of training every day, while an archery apprentice with a longbow was still a beginner after the same amount of practice.

So there was a good reason for the popularity of the crossbow, after the introduction of steel had made it at least equal in power to a heavy longbow in the hands of a strong man.

It is true that references to crossbows prior to the famous edict of the Lateran Council are rare, but they exist. Roman writers had occasionally mentioned a weapon they called *manuballista* or *arcuballista* . . . but there could be some doubt whether the term actually referred to crossbows. Considered as a word, "*manuballista*" just meant a device that threw something and that a warrior held in (or operated with) his hands, and that still left many possibilities open. But such doubts were resolved in 1831. During that year a Roman burial monument with bas reliefs was found near Polignac sur Loire in France; it was later brought to the museum at Puy, and artists could sketch the bas reliefs. Among them was an unmistakable crossbow, complete with *pharetra,* the Roman term for a quiver, as shown in Fig. 1. Unfortunately the artist who made the bas relief must have been poorly acquainted with the weapon, for most of the things one would dearly like to know are simply not shown. It is not clear, for example, whether this crossbow was bent by hand or whether a mechanical device of some kind

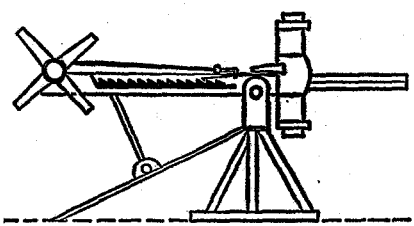

Fig. 3. Philon's *euthytonon,* side view.

was needed. And the most interesting part, the lock mechanism, is hardly indicated.

Nor can the age of the monument be established. Its location in France indicates that the burial took place while the Romans extended over all of western Europe, but this leaves a leeway of several centuries.

Fortunately we are on much firmer ground with another ancient crossbow (Fig. 2.) that goes under the Greek name of

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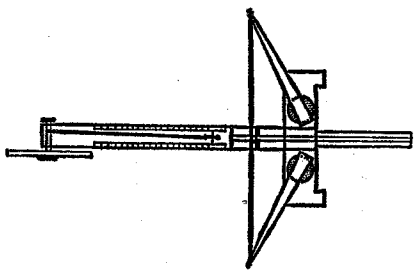
gastrophetes; it is a bit disappointing that this impressive-sounding word just means "belly gun." But at least there is a reason for this name. The "belly gun" was cocked by resting the front end (F) of the slide on the ground and leaning the body weight on the semicircle between the two pieces L and R, which may have been resting on the shoulders of the man while shooting the weapon.

We know about the *gastrophetes* from what is left of the writings of one Ktesibios. Though there were several people by that name, it is pretty certain that the Ktesibios in question is the one who lived during the reign of Ptolemy

Fig. 4. Philon's *euthytonon*, top view.



Physkon (170-117 B.C.), which makes him a contemporary of Philon of Byzantium, another writer who has supplied us with some information about the weapons then in use. Philon's *Belopoiika* — also known as his Fourth Book on Mechanics — did not say anything about crossbows, at least not in the portions of his work that we still have. But he wrote at length about catapults. The Greek experts who had the Prussian Academy of Sciences reissue the work (Greek original with German translation) in 1918 pointed out that Philon's style was clumsy and redundant and that he often sounds pleased that he managed to explain something. Personally I wonder whether Philon's clumsy and redundant style was the result of trying hard to explain difficult concepts to practical men who were handy with tools but not literary lights.

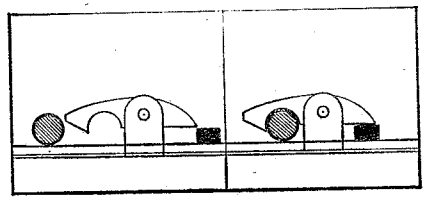


Fig. 5. The lock of Philon's catapult.

At any event Philon carefully described two of the weapons of his time, the *euthytonon* and the *palintonon.* They were fairly much alike, except that the *euthytonon* (see Figs. 3 and 4) shot large arrows while the *palintonon* threw round stones. Very likely the *euthytonon* was used for pointblank shooting when the

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enemy actually attacked, while the *palintonon* was used to harrass the enemy while he was behind fortified positions.

The construction of the *euthytonon* was quite advanced, and Philon's description makes one thing quite clear: it was *not* a large crossbow. In the crossbow, from the *gastrophetes* to the modern target crossbow, the energy is stored into bending something flexible, wood or steel. In the *euthytonon,* and in all similar weapons that were built for the next sixteen centuries to come, the arms are not flexible but rigid. The energy is stored in skeins of cord, or strips of rawhide or horsehair that are twisted around the end of these rigid arms. The bow is not bent — in fact, there is no bow to begin with — but elastic skeins are twisted. As the pictures show, the weapon was wound up by means of a small windlass. Two ratchet hooks saw to it that the weapon did not become unwound just because a hand slipped on the spokes of the windlass. The final catch (Fig. 5) consists of a hook that admits the string of the catapult but could not hold it under tension. It is made secure by sliding a piece of metal (black in Fig. 5) under it. To discharge the weapon this piece of metal was yanked out or knocked out by a hammer blow.

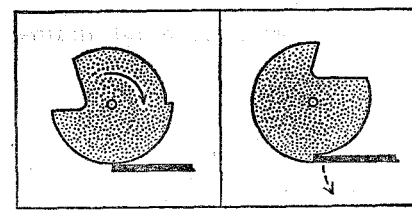
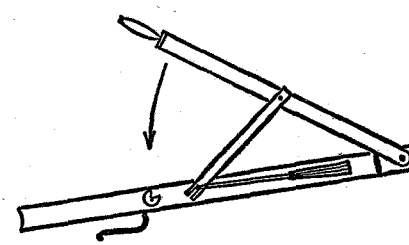


Fig. 6. The "revolving nut" of the medieval crossbow.

A mechanism involving a sudden jerk or blow was, of course, impossible with a portable weapon since it would spoil the aim. The crossbow makers of the middle ages came up with a different mechanism that is usually referred to as the "revolving nut" (Fig. 6). While the crossbow is being bent, or wound up, or cocked, the revolving nut has the position shown at left. The string of the bow, still being tensed, slowly turns it until it has reached the position shown at right, at which point a steel piece at the bottom goes into action

Fig. 7. German crossbow with cocking lever that gave support while shooting.



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and locks it. This strip of steel is connected with the trigger. The trigger of a crossbow used to be large, and in most models the trigger was not slowly pulled back as in modern firearms, but lifted in the direction of the stock of the crossbow.

Now, the whole point of the crossbow was that it was powerful. Its string could not simply be pulled back by the action of four fingers as in an ordinary bow. To bend a crossbow needed at the very least both hands of the sharpshooter; this led to

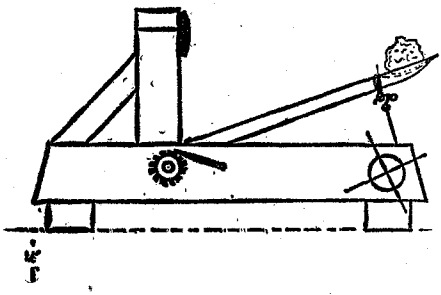

Fig. 8. One-armed torsion engine or catapult.

the strange distinction of a "one foot crossbow" and a "two feet crossbow." The one foot crossbow had a stirrup attached to its front end. The crossbow man placed this stirrup on the ground, put one foot into it and pulled the string up with both hands until it caught in the revolving nut. For the more powerful "two feet crossbow" both feet were needed to steady the weapon. For this reason the bow was attached right to the front end of the stock so that the crossbow man could place one foot on each side of the stock when bending the bow.

For the still more powerful versions even this was not enough. They were equipped with a small windlass or a so-called cranequin, a wind-up device that was placed on top of the crossbow prior to cocking it. Of course it had to be removed prior to shooting, which did not increase the frequency with which bolts could be thrown against the enemy. Somewhat simpler was a cocking lever of which Fig. 7 shows an interesting variation. The picture shows the starting position and it is quite obvious how the lever worked. But then, once the crossbow was cocked, the lever (which could also be detached completely) was folded down over the front end to provide a support. With a 30-inch lever the support was too short for shooting while standing, but it had just the right length for shooting from a kneeling position.

Since crossbows of the more powerful types had ranges up to 350 yards, especially when shot by the defenders of a castle or a walled city who had the advantage of an elevation of thirty

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feet or more over the attackers, the siege engines that were the descendants of the *euthytonon* and *palintonon* had to have a slightly longer range, say 400 yards or better.

Siege engines, ballistas and catapults, blidas and springards, mangonals and trebuchets —they have a multitude of names, and in most cases we can be sure what a manuscript really means only if we have a sketch to go along with the description. There are at least two reasons for the multitude of names: Italian words that may have had Latin or Greek roots originally were adapted by the French to their own tongues, then the Germans took either the Italian or the French form, and sometimes both, and Germanized them. Then, twenty or fifty years later somebody would translate the term into German, not always skillfully. In addition to this problem of overlapping languages, pride played a role. Some small army, say, had two large siege engines of which they were, naturally, quite proud. So they were given names, like ships. But if these names were in any way unusual, a chronicler half a century later and living elsewhere, might think that these were special types of siege engines. Mistaken translations and misunderstood names lengthened the lists.

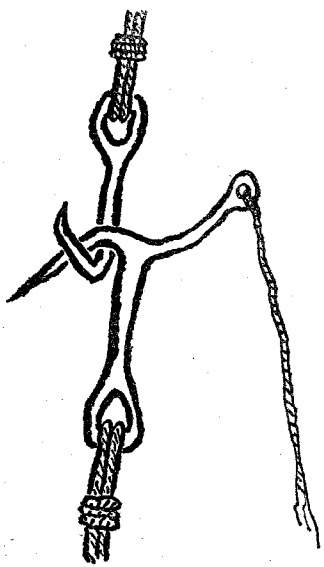

Fig. 9. The slip-hook for releasing a siege engine.

The same thing happened, a few centuries later, with real guns, until finally the gunnery master of the city of Frankfurt am Main, Leonhart Fronsperger by name, cried out in despair: "Of all the guns that are pulled into the field there are just eight [types], four wall breakers and four field pieces, and even if you give a thousand names to them there are still just eight and not more." Master Gunner Fronsperger classified his guns by the weight of shot; we'll have to classify the siege engines by types to get anywhere.

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The confusion must have started early because an otherwise very competent book states that there were only two types originally: one which the Romans called *catapultus* and the Greeks *Katapeltes* and another one which the Romans called *ballista* and the Greeks *lithobolos,*

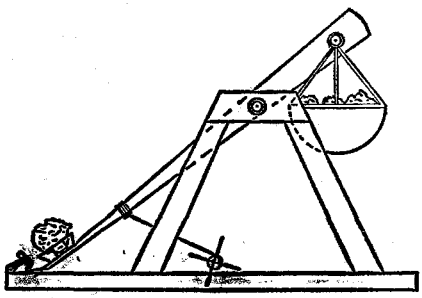

Fig. 10. Counterweight engine, also known as Trebuchet.

Now, *lithobolos* is easy to translate; it means "stone thrower" — that would be the *palintonon* of Philon. As for the word *katapeltes* an attempt at translation is a little more difficult. There was a very similar Greek military term that meant "to overrun" (an enemy position); but the name may also be derived from the two Greek words for "down" and for "shield." In either case one is reminded of Philon's *euthytonon.* But from the engineering point of view the arrow-shooting and the stone-throwing devices were one and the same thing. Both *looked* like crossbows; both had rigid arms and were wound by means of a windlass. And in both the energy was stored by twisting skeins of a flexible material.

Since it was torsion that did the work, the whole family of siege engines — "and even if they bore a thousand names" — should be referred to as the "torsion engines." A one-armed torsion engine, the ones called "catapults" in historical novels and movies, is shown as Fig. 8. Here a very large "spoon" had its handle inserted in a horizontal skein of rawhide strips and, when released, struck a horizontal and padded member. The main advantage of this type of weapon was that almost anything could be put into the hollow of the spoon: rocks, inflammable substances, trussed-up dead animals and anything else that might be handy.

In all of these siege engines all the tension just prior to shooting was sustained by a single rope. In the movies a burly but somehow noble looking warrior stands by with a sharp sword or a hefty battle axe to sever this rope. In reality the armorers of the middle ages used the slip-hook (Fig. 9) that parted reliably when yanked sideways and that could be reused any number of times.

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And now we come to the second type of siege engine, called trebuchet by the French and blida (pronounced like "bleeder") by the Germans. Technically this was a counterweight engine (Fig. 10.) A sturdy wooden basket with a heavy metal frame was filled with rocks, then the long throwing arm was pulled down by means of a winch, and the missile was placed on a spoon or basket at the end.

Many medieval pictures show a sling attached to the end of the throwing arm, and it is stated that this sling extended the length of the arm and therefore the range. But since such a sling had to open at just the right moment I have severe doubts that it was used often. In a small model which I helped to build when I was in high school the sling simply never opened. For this reason I look at pictures of trebuchets with slings as "artist's conceptions" that picture an idea rather than reality.

The final type of siege engine, Fig. 11, went under names like espringale, espringold or springarde. Here the energy was stored by bending a piece of wood which, when released, would strike a heavy spear and propel it over a range comparable to that of other such devices. It probably could

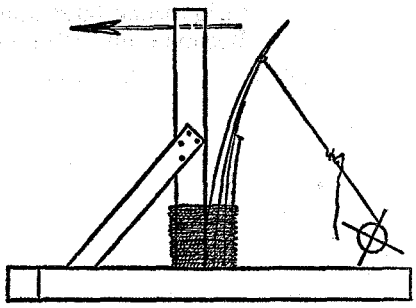

Fig. 11. A "Springarde", or spear thrower.

not be aimed well, but it had the advantage that it was easy to build on the spot. The armorer only had to carry a rope, a winch with ratchet and a slip-hook, and the spears, of course. But this was the only type of siege engine which resembled the bow and the crossbow in function by storing the energy in bending wood. The torsion engines, though they resembled crossbows in appearance were something different. But the crossbow probably took its shape from them; the first crossbows indubitably were just extra heavy bows mounted on a stock.

The *gastrophetes* of Ktesibios is the earliest example of which we have documentary evidence. But the crossbow did not become important until more than a thousand years later when somebody, flexing a fine sword, thought of substituting a steel bow for the wooden one. —WILLY LEY

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THE LAST FILIBUSTER

by WALLACE WEST

All they wanted was an end to war
— and they got it . . . endlessly!

Pvt. 1st Class Henry Cassidy viewed a substance in his soup.

"Might be rubber." He brushed an army of flies away for closer inspection. "Or mule. Or a piece of shoe.

"My God!" he yelled. "I'm tired of this! Crawlin' through the stinkin' jungle. With the fever, the bugs and garbage to eat! All over Korea, the Mekong Delta, and now South America. Why can't the big shots not bother poor devil's that've got six kids?"

Cassidy dumped his soup and jumped on its pannikin.

This act of subversion was observed by Mstr. Sgt. Lawrence Smith, dog-robber to Capt. Timothy Haggerty of the U.S.A.F. The sergeant was given to thinking. The more he thought the more he found worth thinking about. He had four kids and a bullet in his left leg somewhere.

Capt. Haggerty's plane was shot from under him that day. He reached camp by crawling miles through swamps and cane fields, dodging alligators and sharpshooters the while. That night, as he helped Haggerty change from a mud-soaked uniform, Sgt. Smith talked.

"It's not too wild a dream, sir," he concluded, knees quak-

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ing. "Senator Tom Walsh of Montana once suggested the same thing."

Haggerty should have had the sergeant courtmartialed, but he was too exhausted. He held out a badly scratched hand instead.

At breakfast, Tim Haggerty banged the table, achieved silence, dismissed the waiters, locked the mess hall door, and made a proposal. At first his fellow officers listened in puzzled silence. Soon their jaw muscles tightened. A few jumped to their feet.

The time had come for dramatics. Haggerty tossed a lock of sandy hair out of his eyes, unbuckled his pistol holster, and tossed it among the coffee cups.

"Who cares whether the new American frontier is at the Rio Grande, the Isthmus of Panama or the River Plate?" he said quietly. "Who the hell asked for this war anyway?"

He answered his question with four-letter words, repeated the answer, and finally told his listeners what the answer had been.

"Let those responsible fight it out," he shouted. "Let's get out of this sweating hell. Are you with me?"

"Treason!" blurted a white-faced second looie.

"Poetic justice!" whooped a sunburned veteran of four undeclared wars. "We can't lick the damned spicks any more'n they can lick us. This will be a trial by combat, like in the Middle Ages when things got deadlocked. I'm for it."

"Louis Pinedo runs the Brazilo-Argentine circus," a third flyer cut in. "His men think he's *Dios*'s little brother. Let's see what *he* says."

Several hours later a dozen U.S. jets headed for the upper Amazon on a tip wangled from Intelligence. They spotted Pinedo's scarlet fighter. They forced it to land.

Haggerty approached the ship, forelock aslant.

"*Que passe, hombre?*" Pinedo inquired as he clambered out of the cockpit, hands in air. (He was chubby and blond; not the dashing lady killer Tim had expected.)

Haggerty told him.

Pinedo considered until his cigarette burned stained fingertips.

"*Bueno!*"

"December 15?"

"*Excellente.*"

"Junction of the Rios Brazos and Amazon?"

"*Porque no?*"

"Keep in touch, *Capitan.* Sorry to have delayed you."

"*De nada.*" The Argentine bowed grandly. Tim realized he might be a lady killer after all.

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Senate and House were in night session on December 15, struggling to provide more guns and butter before the Christmas recess.

Helicopters drifted over the Capitol. Pedestrians paid little attention. Eggbeaters were common sights, particularly since they had been retired from the front after proving too vulnerable to sharpshooters.

At midnight, Haggerty tossed a bomb into the Senate chamber. Sgt. Smith did likewise in the House. Both missiles released puffs of smoke.

Congressmen panicked and flung themselves against locked corridor doors. A few rushed the visitors' galleries. They wilted on the stairs or as they beat on carved panels.

Lights snapped. Helicopters landed softly on snow. Men in gas masks hopped out with stretchers. They stowed the relaxed legislators. In ten minutes the squadron had sped southward with a great rattling.

When the FBI, CIA and SS came out of shock they found the White House also raided during a late cabinet meeting.

The first horrified reaction was that the Spaniards were at the door, as the British once had been. Soon, however, word filtered from Buenos Aires that similar raids had been made on the Casa Rosada and the headquarters of the Organization of American States.

There was running to and fro by the Establishments. Politicians raved. A-bomb threats were heard once more. But both armies remained bivouacked near the Equator.

Gradually the populace of two continents began to chuckle as the Smith-Haggerty-Pinedo plan dawned on Men in the Streets. The Yankee sense of humor was tickled past bearing. Latin Americans were convulsed. Even those who might have rallied in support of the *status quo* talked, instead, about another Battle of the Century.

The smiling conspirators had miles of bleachers built in that green valley where the Brazos and the Amazon meet. Refrigerated river boats brought endless tons of food and drink. Transport and hotel facilities were arranged. Bullet-proof shields were erected to protect spectators.

Seats soon were selling at scalpers' prices. Even blase Europeans and recently bruised Asiatics contributed their share of ticket money. Africans tried to stand aloof but eventually were caught up in the spirit of the thing. The Inter-American War, which had cost billions and taken 100,000 lives, was turned over-

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night into the greatest sporting event since Nero.

Came the dawn of Washington's Birthday.

"Fair, hot and humid," said the Weather Man in Rio.

"By rigid training," Haggerty announced over a worldwide TV hookup, "each team has reduced its total weight by nearly five tons. Their original uniforms have had to be discarded because they became so large at the beltlines. The U. S. team favored this change until it was learned that their opponents also would get new outfits. Then they claimed a foul. However, a Book of Rules prepared by Hank Cassidy provides that no competitor shall be handicapped by excess equipment, such as 100-pound packs, for example, so the claim was disallowed.

"Now it will be exactly 10 a.m., when you hear the time tone. The great moment has come. A thousand intrepid warriors, if we include Legislative and Administrative Assistants for each solon, are taking the field.

"The Yankees are in blue walking shorts and crash helmets; the Latins in gold-bordered serapes and sombreros. They are armed, all according to the Book of Rules, with sawed-off shotguns, cattle prods, tear gas bombs, machetes, bolas, blackjacks, rusty cavalry sabers, jack handles and switchblade knives.

"Marching ahead of their respective armies came President Wilfred Manchester Jones and Presidente Ernesto Blanco-Machado. They have met in the center of the field. They're shaking hands. They seem to be whispering together. Just a moment, ladies and gentlemen of the worldwide television audience, until I can find out exactly what's going on . . .

"There's been a slight delay," Tim reported some minutes later. "President Jones has asked permission to make a speech. Referee Pinedo is consulting the Book of Rules . . . He's nodding . . . A filibuster is in the making, I fear . . . Yes. That's right. The next voice you hear will be that of the President of the United States of North America."

White mane flowing in the pampas wind, Jones poured forth oratory through countless loudspeakers. For five long minutes he was listened to. Then a quarter of a million sweating bleacherites yelled for action.

When the President ran out of breath and saliva the Presidente demanded equal time on the network. Pinedo and Haggerty conferred anxiously in front of the cameras, then spread their hands. Equal time? Sacrosanct!

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By ones, two, scores, hundreds, thousands, the gallery sought shade from palm trees where purveyors of hot dogs, pizza, frijoles and strange drinks did business. Reporters and commentators played cards or dozed. Haggerty, Pinedo, *et al,* collapsed with laughter under the grandstand.

When Blanco-Machado concluded a three-hour harangue, the Senate floor leader, a one-time Mississippi hog-caller, arose to chant.

Night got its equatorial jump on the stadium as Senator Johnson of Nebraska started his reply to Senator Romas of Minas Gerais. The embattled hosts applauded impartially as Romas yielded to another dim figure that rose to reply to his reply.

Onlookers hurled a final shower of pop and *pulque* bottles and stormed the box office. This was found to be vacant, Haggerty, Pinedo and Smith having departed to apply themselves and their abundant gate receipts to the business of reorganizing bankrupt nations of the hemisphere.

Cassidy was nearly trapped by outraged customers as he ran out with a final bag of coins, but at this point the weather defied the Weather Man and swept the region with a 60-mile gale and 6-inch deluge.

Despite the storm, those bedraggled statesmen talked on, plodding hoarsely through their last filibuster lest worse befall.

Even to this day, Indians of the Amazon, poling their canoes through bayous, pause at the roll of distant thunder and whisper: "*Eschucate!* Great White Fathers still talk."

— WALLACE WEST

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They Hilariated When I Hyperspaced For Earth

by RICHARD WILSON

Illustrated by BODE

"Nobody Earthwards!" they chortled — but onwards indefatigably I flew!

I

They hilariated when he hyperspaced toward Earth.

"Nobody Earthwards," they snickerly advised.

But Young Harmish heeded not, being of stubborn stock, and onwards indefatigably toward the planet near Sol ringed by all that orbiting post-Sputnik junk.

He flew alone in his two-man ship, fearless to the point of foolhardiness because his mission was to kidnap the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Young Harmish had long been a blip on the ARC Light, as it had been named for its American-Russian-Chinese commanders, and now he was clearly visible to Earth's monitors. From their posts in the Light, staked out in a parking orbit in Cislunar Territory like a space-age Ambrose Lightship, they saw him in his spaceship, looking at himself in a Harmish-length mirror. He did not know until much later that from the time the Light picked him up he was also under constant surveillance by U.N. teams who reported directly to the Secretary-General.

The Sec Gen was a Ugandan, N.K. Mboto, a former puisne judge of the High Court at Kampala. Mboto kept peace by run-

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ning the world by the book and fining the hell out of anybody who messed around with what he had come to consider *his*-by-God Charter.

Mboto spoke and swore fluently in Russian, Mandarin and mid-Atlantic English, and the ARC countries' rulers were frankly afraid of him. It was no wonder, then, that they, not to mention Britain, Cuba, Paraguay and most of the others, had given up their sovereignty and put their trust and safekeeping in the hands of an incredibly strengthened United Nations.

Though Young Harmish did not know of the ARC Light, he was linked to the Auxorean equivalents, the ethervid and the spyfax. By using them to study Earth fashions, Y. Harmish had familiarized himself with every detail of terrestrial costuming.

Now he summoned garments out of the fabroid machine and put them on. In the mirror, he saw himself as the very embodiment of a dashing Earth-style blade. His high, hard collar glistened. His slim-jim four-in-hand was pierced by a diamond stickpin. His belt-in-back jacket was stylishly leather-patched at elbows and cuffs, and his knickers draped fashionably over clocked woolen stockings which were set off by buckled oxfords. His pleated white-on-white shirt shone; and his derby hat, from which grew a long Tyrolean feather, sat jauntily on his head.

What Y. Harmish had failed to realize, of course, was that while he was in hyperspace the well-known krono effect had come into play, distorting the eras. The fashions he had seen were a mishmash of the centuries, as if *Men's Wear Magazine* had been afflicted with incurable nostalgia and *Vogue* with *deja vu.*

Satisfied with himself, Young Harmish gave a final glance at the landing coordinates, took up his London-rolled umbrella and strode to the exit. He stepped out on the campus of a university whose students lately had been described as stokers of a hotbed of social action. Plan One was afoot.

Three days later, after a series of frustrations that left him more convinced than ever that Mboto was the man his planet needed, Harmish gave up his preliminary skirmishing and flew to the slablike building on the East River in New York. He felt it was time to go to the top.

Harmish parked a few feet over the north flowerbed and headed for the front door of the Secretariat Building, where a tanned, lean young man was about to go in.

Harmish bowed and said: "My

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pardon extends to you, sir, but these are the Untied Nations?" He knew the English remarkably, he felt.

The man he addressed moved his gaze up from Harmish's shoes, knickers and pleated shirt to his feathered derby, then back to the pleasantly boyish, smiling face.

"These are they," the man said. "What are you, the Shangri-La delegation?"

"Negatively. Auxor, to which I am, does not yet represent itself at the Untied Nations, disfortunately. Savvy?"

"I guess, so pal. My name's Scally. Just get in?"

"Momentarily, Scally-sir. Yes, I-Harmish have made arrival. Young Harmish, to elongate. Relict of Late Harmish, the father, and Old Harmish, grandsir. Auxorean appelatory custom."

"Good for you, son," Scally said. "Look, do you have to present your credentials to Mboto right away? How about a little drink to celebrate your safe arrival? Being a native, I may be in a position to give you a few tips."

Harmish looked pleased. "Deliriously, sir." He remembered an ad. "Yellow gin, perhaps. Distinguished quencher, it is written."

"Any color at all, pal," Scally said. He steered Harmish past a guard with a wave of a press card and took him up the escalator to the delegates lounge. "Yellow gin for my friend," he told the bartender, "and a brown bourbon for me."

Though Jim Scally had a debonair way he was known to his associates as a bitter man who drank more than was good for him. The folding of his paper was only the latest in a series of kicks in the teeth he'd received from life. A messy divorce earlier had left him paying endless alimony to a Tasmanian girl who'd won custody of their two children and who, by returning to her family home in Hobart, had effectively denied him visitation rights. These and a dozen other tough breaks were obviously what had driven Jim Scally to drink.

A gentle conspiracy operated in Scally's favor at the U. N. The conspirators included doormen, guards, press officers and reporters and certain high-ranking members of the Secretariat.

If anybody was going to be technical about it, Scally had lost his accreditation months ago when his newspaper went out of business, and no other news organization hired him. He apparently was able to hang on by doing P.R. work and handling an occasional string assignment. Thanks to the conspiracy, he had the run of the U.N., including the bar. But the bar demanded cash.

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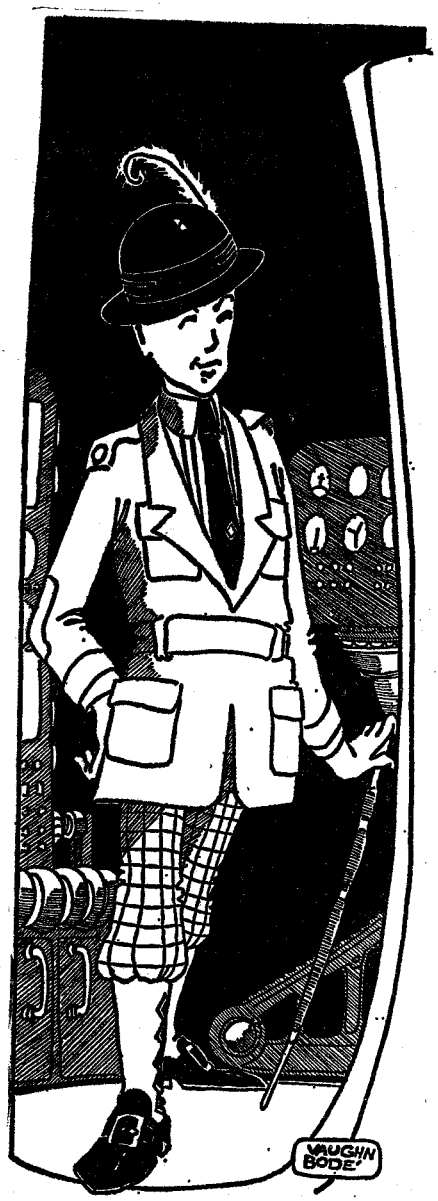

"I'll get this one," Scally said. "Unless — "

"Oh, I demand to pay," Harmish said. "What currency employs itself at the Untied Nations — gold?"

"No, no; good old United — Untied States dollars will do."

"Dollars and pence, yes. Pounds, shillings and ounces. It returns itself to me now." Harmish took out a thick wallet.

"Not pounds, pal. That's English. A good old American ten-dollar bill would do the trick."

Harmish withdrew a ten-dollar bill, American.

Presently, as a Trusteeship Council meeting ended and increasing numbers of people lined the bar, the two moved to a table at the side, Harmish with a second gin and Scally with his third bourbon.

Scally said: "Harmish, pal, I've got to straighten you out. You have no idea of the complexity of New York life. You need a first secretary to handle your business and social affairs."

Harmish was quick to agree. "I nominate you secretary-wallah."

"I accept," Scally said as promptly. "But before we go into the petty details — salary, expense account, bonuses — I'd better know more about you so you get our money's worth. First, exactly where is Auxor?"

"Auxor coextends the land mass

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of my planet. Water encroaches all remaining."

Scally swallowed some bourbon as if to help him grasp the concept. "You mean Auxor is a — a *planet?* You mean you came here in a — a *spaceship,* like astronauts — cosmonauts?"

"Having spyfaxed same, undoubtably," Harmish said.

"It figures," Scally said, re-examining the assortment of clothing the other wore so proudly. "You came alone?"

"Solely Harmish. They hilariated when I hyperspaced for Earth. They disparaged so minor a terminus. 'Nobody Earthwards,' they snickerly advised. 'Is backwater of Galaxy,' they scornheaped. But Harmish, of perseverent bent, pioneerized. Bottoms up, Scally-sir."

"Mud in your eye. So you're a spaceman, Harmish! I'll be damned. The funny thing is, I believe you. Every sockeyed killable — cockeyed syllable."

An incredibly beautiful girl came in with members of an Asian delegation. "Enchantment," Harmish said.

"Depends on your point of view," Scally said. "Once I married the stenographer to an overseas delegation. Disenchantment. Are you married, Harmish?"

"Uxoriously, sir, to every eligible woman."

"Whoa!" Scally said. "How could that be?"

"By means of the sexually pervasive interconsciousness effect, acronymed SPICE."

"SPICE is good. Acronym is better. You read all their minds, know all their sensations?"

Harmish wriggled. "Exactly. Who needs marriage?"

"Some do, sometimes, even if burned once. How does this SPICE effect work?"

"All Auxoreans are mentally joined," Harmish said. "The well known mindlink. In addition, the male-female link works like your country's Operation Match."

"You mean the computer that finds two young people of similar interests?"

"The same. But in Auxor all is done by mentality."

"Is every male linked to every female?"

"Please! No barbarians we! Only non-marrieds. Once a compatibility has been established and marriage consummated, or an extramarital relationship contracted, the partners are taken off the SPICE shelf, so to speak."

"Then you're *not* married, except in this SPICE way?"

"To exactize, no. One day, when the conditions are right, and our antennas are attuned, the contact will be made and I too will have been eliminated from eligibility. I'll have found a wife."

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"Meanwhile you're getting the message from all these gorgeous dames? How does it feel?"

Harmish wriggled again as his attention was called to the sensation. "Impossibly describable. Let me show." And he handed Scally a metallic skullcap. "This connects you with Intergal."

"Intergal?"

"Intergalactic Transmissions. Being Auxorean, I unrequire artificial aids, but for you a booster."

II

Scally carefully put the skullcap on the back of his head, where it seemed to grip his scalp with a half dozen little fingers. There was a rush of overpowering sensation, as if the sky and everything in it were falling directly on him. Then this eased, and he felt as if he were standing on a tall cliff overlooking the sea.

It was a sea of women, and their hair was the waves. They seemed to be standing, facing him, their eyes fixed on his with intense interest. He felt that even if he could make out a face on the far horizon, he'd be able to see clearly into her eyes.

The long hair of these myriads of standing, waiting women, moving in the light wind, was of many colors and tones and heightened the illusion that he was at the edge of the sea. An intoxicating perfume crept up the cliff to him, and there was silence except in his mind.

There, voices spoke tenderly, passionately, inquiringly, wonderingly. But he thought he also recognized some voices similar to a particular one he had known: aloof, disdainful, belittling. With a shudder he shut these out. For a moment it was as if he had been in contact with Hobart, Tasmania.

Then James Franklin Scally heard/felt/received/knew her. One in the multitude was coming through to him. Jim Scally tingled with a thrill of appreciation, almost of recognition.

She bathed him in comfort. She warmed him in the corridors of his heart which had long been ice. Could this be the girl he'd always wanted?

Impossible. A quirk of interstellar communication. A sensation arranged by a stranger who perhaps was an enemy. He tried to put the feeling away. He was getting soft. But he didn't remove the metallic skullcap.

There was a phrase: *I've been looking for you!* and he didn't know whether she had said it, or he, or both.

He knew then that he had been looking for her — in all the wrong places. In New York and London and Brazzaville. In Moscow and

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Peking and Dar es Salaam. In Kodiak and Kuwait and Tel Aviv. In all the places the news had taken him. And now for the first time he'd looked beyond Earth and had found her.

Across the vastness her presence came. An aura. No, it was a name — Aura. He had an impression of slimness, of young excitement tempered with maturity, of fine-boned beauty, of yearning. She was youth and light and hope, an end to searching. His impression of a sea of women had yielded a single isle of peace, of love deep and enduring . . . .

And all that was wrong with it was that it was impossible.

He deliberately broke the contact, snatching off the skullcap. Aura lingered in his mind for a moment, then was gone.

What a hoax! "Intergal" indeed! Scally dismissed her for the phantom she was by swallowing the remains of his drink and loudly demanding another. "My solace comes in whiskey glasses," he said and handed the skullcap back to Harmish.

The alien shrugged. "Reject her if you like, but not me." Maybe it was the drink, it seemed to Scally that there were times when Harmish's speech was more idiomatic than quaint.

"Leaving the women out of it," Scally said brusquely, "do you

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mean you don't know what it is to be alone in your mind — to have privacy of thought?"

"Never alone," Harmish said. "The global Auxorean consciousness comfortingly extends beyond the stars. They speak to me constantly, and I to them."

"That must be maddening."

"You do not tire of yourself, I assume, and we do not tire of ourselves. It is the Auxorean way of life."

"I guess it beats television."

"You've absoluted it," Harmish said. "Take another drink. We commence to be brothers beyond the stars."

Harmish and Scally drank. The alien looked calculatingly at the Earthman and said: "As brothers, let me desist you from the idea that I peacebound come. Au contraire."

"*Au contraire*?" Scally said. He appeared to be quite awash. "Bent on conquest, are you? Good. There's been too much noodling around, peacewise. I'll help you. If there was a war I could be a correspondent. Always wanted to be a war correspondent but never got the chance. No war, you know."

"How sad. But war is not my purpose. My aim is to take away your Secretary-General."

"Oh, that's a good one," Scally said admiringly. "Kidnap Mboto. Snatch him right out of his own front yard. That's sure one daring plan, fellow conspirator."

Harmish nodded. He'd done intensive research, he said, in evaluating Mboto's credentials, and was convinced that the Sec Gen was the only man who could solve the Auxoreans' crisis.

"Tell me more," Scally said, drinking up.

So Harmish told him about his campus visit and his subsequent trip to two Central American countries. He admitted ruefully that he'd been misled by the ethervid and spyfax about the extent of the campus "revolt." The word obviously had different connotations on the campus and in Latin America.

It had also been Young Harmish's intention on the campus to take advantage of alienation, which was making one of its periodic comebacks, as a pilot project for his larger plan. Young Harmish, by definition an alien, was naturally encouraged. Who was more fitted than alien he to lead a revolt of the alienated — this potent lot of potential leaders?

But Young Harmish, despite he cries of "*Uhuru!*", "*Freiheit!*" and "Up the rebels!", was cut dead on the campus. His message, unaccompanied by song or electric guitar and minus the big amplified beat, was obviously in the

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wrong bag. The few who did hear told him politely, without empathy, that *he* wasn't what was happening; at least not to them.

In fact one shaggy young man, to whom Y. Harmish confided a plan to storm the Administration Building, told him: "My God, man, we're not *that* alienated!" Besides, the shaggy young man added, this was dead week; people were cramming for final exams. The student had also told him: "You talk funny, man."

Hurt and puzzled but persevering, Harmish had flown from the campus to the Central American nation of Baranoia, whose leader was the tyrant Lopez-Diaz. Baranoia was on the border of another bothersome little country called Paranoche, whose leader was the dictator Avila-Perez.

Harmish was received courteously by Lopez-Diaz, who took him to a cafe in the square of the capital city.

The Baranoians, who had been rehearsed, cheered and sang when Lopez-Diaz appeared in the square with his guest and continued to cheer as they went into the cafe and reappeared on the balcony, where they could dine in privacy. They began their meal with Rob Roys. Lopez-Diaz did not drink the local wine; he used virtually none of the shoddy native products.

The ceremonial cheering ended. The typical street noises of a Latin American capital in ferment rose to their ears. The conversation on the balcony was punctuated by sounds of breaking glass, gunshots, chanting, sirens and an occasional scream.

Encouraged by the obvious unrest, Harmish waited only until the second round of Rob Roys to offer the use of an Auxorean bomb to Lopez-Diaz.

(Scally wanted to know about the bomb. Harmish said it wasn't much — just a Class 3 reservoir-digger, with a radiation trap that collected all the bad Geigers and jettisoned them perpendicularly into space. It had been Harmish's larger plan, he confided, to test Mboto's reaction to a crisis. If Mboto dealt with it adequately, Harmish would then make his move.)

The Baranoian leader appeared to give very careful consideration to the offer of the bomb and what might lie behind it. Finally he said: "You ask me, senor, whether I will drop your bomb on the capital of my hated rival, Avila-Perez of Paranoche? Whether, in the vernacular of the Norteamericano, I will put my money where my mouth is?"

Harmish, excited to eloquence, said: "That is precisely the ask I put to you."

Lopez-Diaz hesitated a mo-

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ment longer, then said decisively: "Alas, the answer must be no."

Harmish was stunned. "You decline because you unwish to visit such suffering on fellow human beings?"

Lopez-Diaz snorted. "There isn't a humanitarian bone in my body. My reason is simple: I fear Mboto."

"An ignoble answer," Harmish vouchsafed peevishly.

"Perhaps. But consider my position and that of my hereditary enemy, Avila-Perez. We have much in common, as we learned when we met by chance in a night club in New York. Avila-Perez and I discussed our nearly identical problems at the club and later at the home of two ladies, and again in the U.N. bar during a recess of the international conference that had taken us north."

"And you concluded?"

"That the world is big enough for both of us, considering the presence in it also of Mboto — Mboto the savage-once-removed, the saint-and-destroyer, who would not hesitate to eliminate either or both of our countries to prevent more extensive destruction. That Mboto is one to be feared and admired. A practical man first, an idealist second."

Harmish showed his disappointment. He said: "These cannot be the words of Lopez-Diaz, the Protector of Baranoia, as I have heard him called, the notorious Latam dictator who threatens night and day to obliterate the oppressor, to counterinvade the Commie foe, to inquisit the infiltrator."

'Look, senor, I talk big but I don't want war. Mboto'd kill me — literally. I'm just an old-fashioned rabble rouser whose way is to exhort the populace now and then to make them feel better about being poorer than the people of Paranoche. Mboto understands this. Meanwhile he and the U.N. are helping us catch up with Paranoche by sending machinery and medicine, technicians and teachers and others who seem genuinely concerned about us." He shrugged. "This appeals to my romantic nature. You can't fight love."

Frustrated, Harmish said: "I will offer my bomb to Avila-Perez to drop on Baranoia."

Lopez-Diaz laughed. "He will tell you the same as I, my friend. He too stands in mortal fear of that sweet but murderous peacekeeper, Mboto."

And Avila-Perez did tell Harmish the same, too, in the most courteous way, when the alien flew to the capital of Paranoche in the private plane of Lopez-Diaz as a distinguished, if discomfited, guest of The Protector.

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Avila-Perez told him Mboto fortunately understood that the horrendous threats Avila-Perez made again Baranoia were for internal consumption. He also said that he, Avila-Perez, much as he liked Harmish and appreciated his offer, would have him put to death before he would risk the possibility of conflict with Baranoia.

Harmish expressed consternation.

"And well you might," the leader of Paranoche said. "I expressed similar consternation, my friend, when for some minor peccadillo of mine Mboto blacked us out for a week. Utter quarantine. I didn't know there was such a thing. Some offshoot of the ARC Light did it. No communications of any kind with the rest of the world. Demoralizing, like solitary confinement."

"When?" Harmish asked.

"Three years ago. Then just as the quarantine was lifted we were hit by Hurricane Hildy. With no warning from the U.N. weather service, or anywhere else, there was no chance to get the crop in early. So naturally, because we're a one-crop economy and because that crop equals thirty per cent of own gross national product, we were knocked flat on our economic backs for longer than I care to remember. Mboto doesn't fool around. He

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scares the pants off me, if you want to know the whole truth, and I refuse to give him any excuse to make an example of me."

"You admit cowardice?" Harmish asked.

"I'm a live coward," Avila-Perez told him."What I am saying to you, with all due respect, is go peddle your bomb to some other slob. This one knows better than to tangle with the Sec Gen."

Harmish left Paranoche and, in a thoughtful mood, headed for New York, home of the United Nations and of Mboto, its Secretary-General.

III

It was almost like a stage entrance. Harmish had just finished describing his Latin-American fiascoes to Scally in the U.N. bar when the Sec Gen came in alone and joined them.

Mboto had never been one to stay aloof in his luxury quarters high atop the Secretariat Building. He roamed all parts of his domain like a fearless and friendly but awesome lord.

He sat down with Harmish and Scally and told a waiter who rushed over: "Two more of the same for these gentlemen and a Bloody (pardon the expression, Steward, I see you are British) Mary for me."

"No offense taken, Your Excellency," the waiter said and went off to the service bar.

Scally started to get up respectfully, but a powerful black hand pushed him down into his chair. "A new face in our midst?" the Sec Gen asked. "An imaginative new costume, anyway. Somebody must have invented time travel; he looks 19th century."

"He's an alien," Scally said.

"We're all aliens here," Mboto said. "Even you in what you call your country, you breaker of pacts with the Red Man."

"Touche, Chief," Scally said. "I don't defend our lousy past."

"You should avoid calling an African 'Chief,'" the Sec Gen said. "He may be sensitive about his tribal background."

Scally grinned as the waiter came with the drinks. "It's a fact. Harmish is literally an alien, from an extraterr — from deep in space, like."

"If that's journalese," Mboto said, "you speak it with a quaint descriptive flavor."

"It's not journalese. It's just that if you'd drunk as much Bourbon as I have, your theech might be spick, too."

Mboto turned to Harmish. "You can tell that our waspish friend here is subconsciously a minority-hater. Spick, indeed. Let's introduce ourselves. I'm Mboto, Secretary-General of the United Nations."

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"*Untied* Nations," Scally muttered, slumping.

Harmish beamed across the table. "Exhilarated, sir. You are the he I have light-yeared to acquaintance. I, Y. Harmish, relict of but revanent to, one hopes, Auxor. In truth an alien, but adaptable, I vouchsafe."

"Maybe we should close the bar," Mboto said. "It's raising hell with the language."

"Humor?" Harmish asked, straining. "Irony? I limp behind, uncomprehensive."

"Your candor does your credit. What brought you across the trackless void?"

Scally muttered: "Trackless, hell. Harmish, he track'um, Lord. Big wheel back home, Harmish be."

"And honored here as well, Scally. I think we close'um bar, though; you drinkum too much firewater. My word, tongue blong along you, him flappum too much altogether."

"Big kidder. I hope," Scally said, subsiding.

The Sec Gen turned back to Harmish, who had been listening with agonized attention, and asked: "What did bring you across the void, trackless or otherwise, which we primitives of Earth have yet to probe in depth?"

"An unworthy motive, perhaps, now that you have impinged on me with favor," Harmish said. He took out of his breast pocket a curious device and held it toward the Sec Gen. "All sincere, I display this."

"You must be as drunk as Scally," Mboto said.

"Negatively. Alcohol fails to permeate one of my metabolic type. The grains but convert themselves to energy potential, known on Auxor as Enerpo."

The Sec Gen said: "You seem to have the advantage of me, if only linguistically. But, having seized yourself of the situation, as we diplomatic types say, you must have an agenda. What is your pleasure, Mr. Chairman?"

Harmish rolled his eyes. "Distract me not," he said. "My pleasure awaits my return to Auxor. My duty is another thing — the abduction of you."

"Foolhardy adventure," Mboto said. "I have only to lift an eyebrow, and hidden guards who watch my every movement will reap you like so much wheat. Will you reconsider, Y. Harmish? Or must the first interstellar alien be a dead alien?"

Harmish seemed unafraid. "Perhaps you misunderstand. What points itself at you is no weapon except in the economic sense. Y. Harmish offers no violence but — a job. That which you have mistaken as a weapon

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is the Auxorean equivalent of your phenomenon yclept credit card. But with exception that no statement presents itself. Phenomenon is portable programmer of plenty. Wish-fulfillment device. Translator of dreams."

It was then that Harmish explained in his quaint way that he was offering the Secretary Generalship of Auxor to Mboto because Auxor was adrift in indecision, mediocrity, apathy, anomie, apartness ("Just don't call it Apartheid," the Sec Gen said) and other modern manifestations that were threatening to plunge it into a new dark age, or worse, into oblivion.

"Sounds like Earth, pre-Mboto," Scally said. "Why not use your own Enerpo gadget to fix things up?"

Harmish sighed. Then, with fetching modesty he explained that he had tried — that he himself was the equivalent of the Secretary-General of Auxor. He paused for reaction, but the others merely waited for him to go on.

Chagrined, Harmish said the universal mindlink nullified the effect of any device, mechanical or psychological, that an Auxorean — even he — might use against another.

Harmish said: "True, Auxor's most active minds are hereditarily immune to the mindlink, but they languish in durance, along with their owners. The gumption people, the vital ones, go to jail. The rest are a lot of sorries, apathetic, unimaginative."

"But surely there are those whose energy is channeled productively," Mboto said. "Those who have made scientific, medical, artistic advances."

"Nothing is artistic about Auxor any more. Anyone with an idea knows it will be instantly absorbed into the mass consciousnes. It would be as if — name one of your planet's great works, widely copied — "

"Mona Lisa, David . . . "

"Perfectly. As if the Da Vinci or the Michelangelo, coextensively with the moment of its completion, was already globally copied. As if a googolplex of reproductions came into being simultaneously. Incentive is destroyed."

"I can see that," Mboto said; "but what could I possibly do about it?"

"Yours is a powerful mind. We've tasted it, unknown to you. We found its power suprawestern, supraglobal; it transcends that of civilized man's; it has potentialities unexplored by you or your fellow men. Your mind is strong enough to share itself with a selected number of Auxoreans, as an experiment; to inspire them to

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rise from torpor; to infect them with Mbotolike dignity and ego; to show that a tribal man, whose concepts were those of the group, could grow to be a supremely individual person, an artist of mankind."

Only a powerful alien mind, such as Mboto's, screened against the Auxorean mindlink by its alien nature, could be effective, Harmish insisted with an eloquence that again made him sound quite un-Harmishlike.

It appealed to the savage in Mboto, who hadn't had to smash a rebellion or destroy a dictator in a loon's age. In a way it was unfortunate that he no longer had to worry about Earth.

Mboto could leave the U.N. in good conscience, he knew. The world would be in hands as competent as his own. By unspoken arrangement, Mboto's successor had already been picked and agreed to by the ARC nations and therefore all others.

The successor-designate was a strong-willed man with an abhorrence to war as deep as his own. A further asset was that he also represented a nonwhite race. He was a man called Ohiro Kashawa, who was born to radiation-crippled parents in 1945 in a target of opportunity called Hiroshima. Ohiro Kashawa was widely respected and popularly known as O.K.

But there was an unfilled want that Mboto had on Earth.

Mboto told Harmish: "Five years ago, I would have been tempted. That was when I went out in public more often than I do now. Occasionally I still found myself seated next to the kitchen door in some fashionable restaurant. But there's been progress. Not giant strides but an encouraging amount. Slowly I was accepted in these restaurants. Not because of my skin, mind you, but because of my position. Then I became more fashionable than the restaurants and the 'in' people began to eat where I ate, even at Spanish Charlie's in East Harlem. I don't eat out any more, at all. Now I have a bigger ambition than to sit comfortably in a restaurant."

This was news to Scally. "What's that, sir?" he asked.

Mboto looked as modest as Scally had ever seen him. The Sec Gen took a deep breath and said, looking down at the table: "I want to resign from the U.N., settle here and be the first Negro president of the United States."

There was a long silence. Then Scally asked: "How could that be? You're not a citizen."

"I was born in the U.S. Embassy in Kampala and had dual Uganda-U.S. citizenship until I was 18, when I chose to be a

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Ugandan. You forget that when I became Secretary General the Congress of the United States restored my U.S. citizenship to me. Not honorary, but actual citizenship. I'm well over 35 and as fit to be president as you are, Scally, my fine white American friend."

"I remember now," Scally said. "But, still — "

"Still you question my motives," the Sec Gen said. "Is it more than vanity, you ask? I think it is. Look at the history of America's dark-skinned people. Look where they grow up — Little Rock, Selma, Harlem, Watts. Look at the vast number of potential geniuses who never had a chance. Many have overcome handicaps of color or poverty to develop their talent. You know their names as well as I. But think of the thousands of other potential geniuses who died — physically or spiritually — because they never survived the misery and hopelessness of a Negro ghetto."

"But if you were in the White House — ?"

"Obviously," Mboto said, "I'd be their inspiration. The beginning of fulfillment. Everything else would be detail."

Scally sat in silence, contemplating the future.

"I'll stay on Earth," Mboto told Harmish.

IV

The crestfallen Harmish said "My crest has fallen. Is al lost?

Mboto said: "You can't hav me or O.K., but I'd like to help you."

"You must help me," Harmish pleaded. "All that I have described to you is secondary — something we could survive. The deeper threat is one I've been ashamed to tell. Ashamed for myself — my people."

"And what is that?" Mboto asked kindly. "Forget your shame if help is possible."

"Sterility," Harmish said.

"Of course!" Scally said, coming to. "All those women — that sea of women I imagined I saw when I put on your skull cap."

"A symbol, merely," Harmish said.

"Sure, a symbol — a symptom of what's wrong. Among the impressions I had was a lack of fulfillment. An emptiness. A yearning. Sure, they marry — but what's the ultimate fulfillment for a woman? A child — children. The only eternity anyone can be sure of."

Harmish looked surprised. "You've absoluted it," he said.

"Right. They can't, or won't have children —"

"Can't," Harmish said. "Because they despise their men.

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They're psychologically unable to bear children in a world so sunk in mediocrity that it'd be a living death. They'd rather see the race die than perpetuate it as it is."

Scally subsided again. Mboto said: "You'd like me to change all that? Alone? I'm flattered. I'll match my virility with any man's, but I don't really think I'm up to repopulating a planet."

Harmish looked hurt.

"You misunderstand. I expect no insemination from you, unless you choose individually. We are monogamous."

"I joked where I should not have," Mboto said. "It's a serious matter. You need an expert to make an on-the-spot study and do whatever is necessary to shake them out of their skins. You need a renaissance — literally a rebirth. A born leader. A man with a passion for living. Someone to provide an example. But I've told you why I can't go. Take Scally."

"Scally? Esteemed, but ineffectual Scally?"

"Don't scornheap, Harmish," Mboto said. "Scally can help you if any Earthman can. He's tough enough to be ruthless, but he writes mystical, beautiful and often hopeful poetry. The Hammarskjold influence, I except. There's nothing in his personal life to keep him here, and it's about time he had some happiness. I understand the Auxorean maidens are not to be sneezed at."

"Sneezed at?" Harmish asked.

"Idiom. I mean they're pretty swell, aren't they? By and large?"

"Swell? Large? They do. They are. In places. Yes."

"So take him. Just don't tell the Security Council or the New York *Times*."

"But he lacks experience," Harmish protested.

Mboto laughed. "He has more theoretical and practical experience than Ohiro Kashawa and me combined. That means he's an all-round expert in geopolitics, not to mention economics, linguistics, anthropology and psychology. He was the first Schweitzer Scholar at The Maxwell School. I'm sure he hasn't told you he's James Franklin Scally, Ph.D., *summa cum laude*, of the same class that produced a Secretary of State and a Governor of New York. Nor has he become a bum since. Don't think he's one-tenth as drunk or ineffectual as he may appear. Let me tell you a secret, Young Harmish, as one Secretary-General to another. I've been a party to your conversation with Scally since it began. There's a microphone sewed into his lapel and a receiver elsewhere, as there always is when Scally's on a mis-

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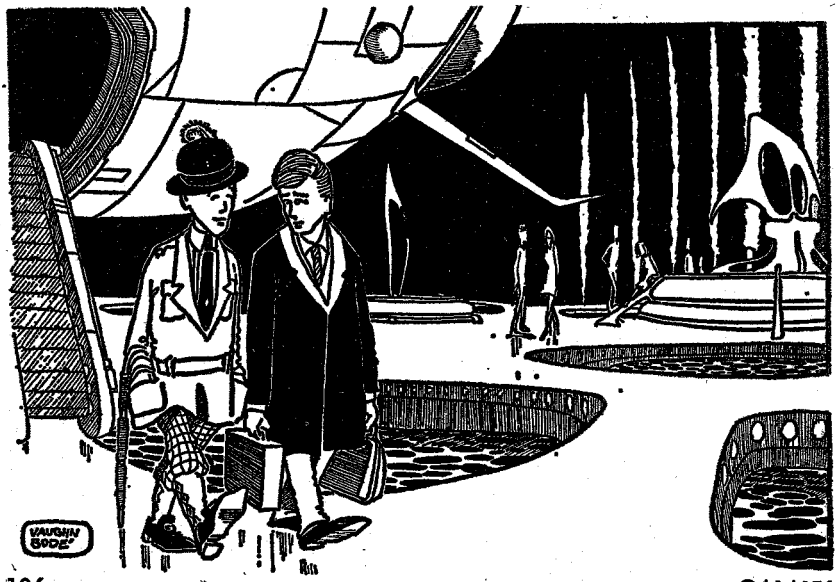
sion. Not quite Auxor's interconnected consciousness, but good enough for our purposes. Let me tell you another secret:

"Scally is now and has been since I came here from Kampala the number three man in the United Nations, right after O.K. Only you and the three of us know it. This gave Scally the freedom neither O.K. nor I had to talk to people in crises and to move relatively unnoticed to trouble spots. Scally's interventions, proposed by me to the Security Council but drafted by Scally, have settled half a dozen crises in the past five years.

"You may have heard of the abortive coup at Qatif. Or the incident of the Andalusian Fog. Or the short-lived Battle of the Land Bridge at Bering. Or the most explosive of all, the Siege of Novaya Zemlya. Any of these could have erupted into a global war, an Earth-destroying war. But Scally flew to each. While he was digging out the reportable facts for his paper, he gave the U.N. the unpublishable background and made his recommendations for a settlement. O.K. and I then went through the motions of acting on it, but it was really Scally's solution."

Y. Harmish looked with new respect at James Franklin Scally, putative sot, who now grinned and said: "Who bespeaks me?



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What name blong along Scally-sir dost thou take in vain? Another bourbon, Innkeeper, an you love me. I'll go anywhere, at any time, and talk to anyone in the interests of peace. Who else said that? Make it a double, Innkeeper. One to get ready and two for the road."

"He's not nearly as *non compos* as he sounds," Mboto said. "He is fairly sozzled but withal he's literate, perceptive and fair-minded. He had too small a chance on Earth; terrestrial posterity passed him by until O.K. and I discovered him, and then we had to keep him a secret to preserve his effectiveness. There may be thousands more like him, undiscovered; maybe we can find them. Meanwhile let's give Scally a chance to be himself on Auxor."

Harmish and Scally looked at each other with new eyes.

"I guarantee him," Mboto said.

Back on Auxor then, Young Harmish asked the Hon. James Franklin Scally, after they'd disembarked and were getting accustomed to the pleasantly lesser gravity: "How are things, Your Excellency?"

Jim Scally, Ph.D., Secretary-General Designate of Auxor, inhaled shallowly, experimentally. He could breathe the air, or whatever it was. A little spicy, maybe, but he'd had to make do with a lot worse, such as the stuff in the Lincoln Tunnel in rush hour and a sandstorm in the Sinai Peninsula.

"How's it smell, Jim?" Harmish asked, and his guest noticed the improvement in his language. "I think you'll find it not too bad."

Scally saw that they were crossing a parklike public square, through which people strolled leisurely, enjoying the warmth of a sun that was bigger and duller than Earth's. Like his friend Harmish, they were people of recognizable shapes, including shapely female people.

"It agrees to me so far," Scally found himself saying.

"Glad to hear it." Harmish was using good colloquial speech,

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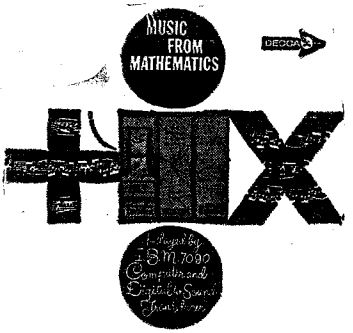

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Scally noticed again. He was the one who was speaking pidgin, or whatever construction Y. Harmish had employed on Earth.

Scally tried to correct this. Recalling the farewell party the United Nations Correspondents Association had given for him, without knowing his mission, he said: "They hilariated when I hyperspaced for Auxor. Nobody Auxorwards, they snickerly advised."

"More fools they," Harmish said. "We get debriefed in the Headquarters building across the park. A formality only."

Scally nodded in confident tranquility. One of the female Auxoreans had caught his eye and was smiling at him. He stopped and grabbed Harmish's arm. She was smiling and communicating!

The SPICE effect! Intergal! She was the slim, lovely, comfort-giving girl whose mind had flown to his out of the sea of women. Was she wordlessly telling him her name was Aura? Now he knew the hope her wordless message had expressed. She was destined to be his partner in the mission to unsterilize Auxor.

He saw Harmish nodding corroboration and he knew she'd be there when he returned to the square from Headquarters. And he knew that she knew.

— RICHARD WILSON

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THE TROJAN BOMBARDMENT

by CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

It was America's most guarded Secret Weapon. Unfortunately its backfire threatened us too!

General Pier S. Hardesty placed his finger on the map.

"Here, at Karnak City. A twenty-hour bombardment, and bombing round the clock until I say 'Stop.' Also at the road junction north of Hellcat Pass. I want the defenses there plastered."

Burns, the artillery officer, shook his head. "We can do anything you want to Karnak City. But we can't hit that road junction till we either capture both ends of the pass or get some kind of position on the south slope of the Hellcat Mountains. There's a little matter of lofting those shells over that mountain range."

"What's the matter?" Hardesty demanded. "You've got 915 mm. howitzers running out your ears."

"Yes, sir. But the shells have a somewhat different trajectory from what you might expect. I'd like to take the lot of these 915's and — " Burns told in short language what he would like to do with them. Hardesty listened critically, then shook his head.

"You couldn't do it," he said. "They wouldn't fit. Personally, I'd like to —"

The air officer put in, in a purring voice, "If Colonel Burns feels that his artillery can't make it over the foothills, I'm sure we can plaster this road junction,

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General. With any kind of explosive, incendiary or distractant you care to use."

"What we're up against is a collection of half-starved, communized fanatics here, and semi-lunatic do-gooders at home," said the general. "Personally, I'd like to take these Kazang rebels and slaughter the lot of them. But they pop down holes like rats, bob up somewhere else, to put a bullet through the back of your head, and if we give them what they deserve, everybody's afraid their coreligionists will rise up and the thing will spread instead of ending." He shook his head. "So — we're using distractants only."

'Yes, sir," said the air officer. "Well, *we* can reach that road junction, sir."

Burns, the artillery officer, said, "*Live* distractants. They have to hit the junction with a reasonable facsimile of pinpoint accuracy."

"We can — "

"*Without jarring.*"

"Ah."

"Parachutes won't work. Vaned containers induce nausea and make a bad psychological effect. Our 915's have a rotating base and tip, stabilized canister and proximity-controlled shortlife superrotating pop-out blades. They land the load *gently*."

The air officer snorted. "But at the beginning, this same load starts off how? It's *shot out of a gun*."

Burns nodded. "Using micro-timed charges and safety vents to insure smooth acceleration, with internal cushioning in the canister, rocket-assist units, and a barrel proportioned to fit a coast-defense gun instead of an honest howitzer. These 915's may burn the ears off an artilleryman now and then, but they don't hurt the charge."

The air officer shook his head in disgust. "What a war."

General Hardesty eyed him speculatively. "Can you air-drop these distractants on that road junction?"

"Well, sir — "

"Our canisters," said Burns helpfully, "are armored, to prevent unfortunate incidents."

The air officer said in disgust, "No, sir. I'm afraid we can't compete under those conditions. Not yet, at least."

"All right," said Hardesty. "Let's get this mess straightened out and get squared away. First we hit Karnak City. Twenty-hour bombardment and bombing around the clock, until I'm satisfied they've had it. There's three battalions of the Kazang Death's Head Elite Guard holed up in there, and they aim to make a house-to-house defense and then afterward claim we desecrated the

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temple when they left. We want to be sure they're well softened up before we move in."

"Yes, sir. As — the charges?"

"A, B and C, but no D. I have to reserve D for that road junction." He eyed Burns coldly.

"Sir," said Burns, "the 915's just won't reach that junction. That's all there is to it. But if you decide to soften it up with A and B distractants, out of 155-S howitzers, we can do that for you."

Hardesty nodded. "All right. Hit the pass with A and B for a couple of hours, then walk on back and plaster the junction."

"When we move up later," said Burns, "we can hit the junction with all the D you want. Ah, that is, with as many D canisters as you can load."

"All right. That will have to do it."

Burns saluted and left at a trot. The air officer saluted and ran off in a different direction.

A perspiring individual in fatigues, with "Correspondent" sewed at his shoulder, scribbled frantically in a notebook and eased closer to the scowling general.

"Ah — General Hardesty. May I ask, sir, how do you feel about the effectiveness of this new and advanced means of — er — settling international conflicts?"

"I've been directed to use it," said the general, "and I'm using it."

"Yes, sir, but how do you *feel?* What is your *assessment* of the *effectiveness* of this method?"

Hardesty squinted at the correspondent like a large dog eyeing a small porcupine. The fellow was a nuisance, all right. And there was no question but that Hardesty could obliterate him. But in the process, he might collect some painful mementos that would fester for a long time afterward.

"It works," said Hardesty abruptly, "in the short run. In the long run, I foresee some difficulties."

"H'm. Might I ask, sir — "

"I can't tell you what's going to go wrong without tending to precipitate the very thing I want to avoid. Just stick around. You'll see."

"M'm." the correspondent was scribbling fast in his notebook. The general suddenly wondered how much of that was going to be legible later and how many illegible sections would be bridged over by the correspondent's imagination. He glanced at his watch and saw that there were still a few moments till the 105's opened up and the air arm went into action. He frowned back at the notebook. "What system of shorthand is that you're using?"

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"Shortland? Oh, my own, general. I leave out all the vowels and capitals, and don't bother with the punctuation."

The general nodded. "Just as I thought."

Underfoot, the ground jumped.

A few moments later someone shouted, "Drones out, sir!"

The general nodded.

A thunderous concussion rolled out across the flat green land and echoed back from the hills ahead. There was a continuous trembling underfoot. Dark forms blurred into the sky, to vanish in the direction of Karnak City, the Kazangs' ancient capital and religious center. With a roar, the aircraft began to take off.

Someone shouted, "Drones transmitting, sir!"

The general nodded and walked fast for the TV shack. The correspondent stayed close at his heels.

"Sir!" shouted the correspondent. "Would you say this new and more sophisticated means of — ah — settling disputes is an outgrowth of the spectacular increase in our productive capacity, consequent upon progressive scientific and technological advances, and the rationalization of productive methods?"

"I suppose so."

"Would you say that it represents a hopeful development in relations between states and differing ideological systems and viewpoints?"

"That I don't know." The general ducked past a guard and through a doorway. Behind him, there was an angry outburst as the guard stopped the correspondent. The general ran down a flight of steps, turned a corner, went by another guard, and through another doorway. Before him were about a dozen big TV screens, arranged in a semicircle, with operators adjusting the screens for clarity and speaking through headphones to the drone-controllers overhead. Roughly half of the screens were already lit.

The nearest lighted screen showed a street of small shops, with a trench across the street, the heaped-up dirt forming a parapet, and the crowded figures of Kazang rebels armed with tommy-guns and bazookas peering out over the dirt. Down the street, others looked out from barricaded shops. One of the men pointed up and shouted, as a small parachute drifted down, supporting some kind of dangling burden.

Instantly a fanatical-looking soldier raised his gun and shot at it, creating a dazzle of flying fragments and a splash of something dark on the front of the parapet. A second soldier bent over the parapet, straightened,

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and shouted something. The first soldier took aim toward another parachute drifting down. A third soldier changed grips on his gun, and smashed the first soldier over the head.

The small parachute drifted closer, and was immediately snatched from the air. For an instant, its burden was clear on the screen — a bottle suspended on a cord and labeled:

Govt. Issue
WHISKEY
For offensive
use only.

More and more parachutes were drifting down, and more and more enemy troops were rising from holes to snatch them out of the air.

Officers appeared, shouting furiously, to be hit on the head by drifting bottles labeled, "Govt. Issue — RUM — For offensive use only."

The populace was now reappearing in the streets, to snatch at drifting bottles.

Discipline and order were clearly giving way, save where one grim and burly officer dealt out a savage harangue and then cautiously tried a sip from a bottle, and spat it on the ground. Obviously he was warning that it must be poison. Now, however, a surprised look crossed his face, and he tried again. He raised his eyebrows, took off his helmet, eyed the bottle with a frown, and tried a third sip.

More small parachutes were now drifting down, marked with concentric stripes, where the first had been in solid colors. These latter bore small cartons lettered:

Govt. Issue
CIGARETS*
For offensive
use only.
—
**Caution*: May be harmful
to your health.

The general watched alertly. Surely in his religious capital *something* would happen to prevent the distractants from working unhindered. But if it was going to happen, it would have to happen fast. The troops had not left their posts as yet, but they were making good use of every drifting opportunity as it wafted by.

Now came a third set of parchutes, marked with varicolored rays and bearing boxes of assorted sizes, that troops and populace alike tore open, at first warily, and then with wild abandon.

Inside was a variety of different things, some boxes holding big flashlights that lit up brightly, others containing box cameras,

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and others clocks, already showing the correct time. All of these things were somewhat large and breakable, but useful, and good by local standards.

The general glanced from screen to screen. To his experienced eye, it now seemed clear that resistance in Karnak City would fold up without any serious struggle. So much for that. But there was still the pass on his left front. Once he had that, and the road junction beyond, any counterattack would have to proceed by awkward detours. But the road junction was held by an enemy general who knew exactly what the situation was, and he was there in person.

From behind General Hardisty came the sound of loud arguing, and then the correspondent, shoving passes and authorizations back into his pocket, thrust into the room and stopped to stare at the screens. From his face, it was evident that he had heard the theory of this procedure but had never seen it in action before.

"Ah — ah — *General,*" said the correspondent. "Ah — this is a bombardment with A, B, and C charges?"

"Correct."

"But no D charges?"

"That's right. No D."

"A is — ah — "

"Liquor."

"And B?"

"Cigarets. C is bulky breakable objects of local value."

"Why bulky and breakable?"

"When the enemy soldier has something bulky and breakable that he values and wants to hang onto, it cramps his style considerably. Picture yourself trying to fight a war with a portable TV in one hand."

"I see. What is a D charge?"

"Stick around. You'll see."

"And the object of this 'distraction attack' is — ?"

"According to the book: 'Vast quantities of wealth and productive effort are expended in the production of munitions, only a tiny fraction of which ever strike a living target. Much is wasted, even in attacks upon inanimate objects. Where these objects are hit, valuable structures are destroyed and must be replaced at considerable expense by the victors, when they occpy the conquered territory. A railroad, for instance, destroyed in the attack, must be replaced in the occupation. This all creates much waste and duplication of effort. *Desirable* objects, however, like the Trojan horse, will be actively sought by the populace, and *each one* will, in effect, strike its target. A more desirable way to block a road or railroad is to place thereon an object of great value to the defender, who will feel im-

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pelled to remove it carefully. Much can be accomplished by using objects of *local* value to block facilities of *national* value. In this way, one interest in the country can be led to oppose another. By judicious use of this method, a chaotic situation may be created wherein the united enemy fragments into local groups. Since comparatively little killing of the enemy is involved, the actual aggressor using this method incurs comparatively little ill-feeling. It is a method which, of course, can by effectively use only by a highly productive and well organized power, with highly developed technology and reliable and flexible transportation system.' "

The correspondent wrote urgently in his notebook, then looked up. "And this method is what we're using?"

"Exactly."

"What if someone shoots at our men?"

"If it's serious, shoot back."

"Doesn't that create ill will?"

The general shrugged. "Consider this present setup. An inefficient but at least anti-communist government is overthrown by fanatical communist rebels, who seize the capital and drive the legitimate but inefficient government to the coastal city from which they now rule what's left of the country. The efficient but communist rebels take over, have a blood purge, exterminate anyone unfortunate enough to have possessions and make so much bad feeling that they're afraid of being overthrown themselves, so they efficiently create a murderous dictatorship. Meanwhile, the legitimate government invokes our mutual-defense treaty and urges us to come in and slaughter every rebel Kazang with a head on his shoulders. Are you under the impression that anybody can do anything in such a setup without creating bad feeling of *some* kind?"

The correspondent blinked. "Yes, I see."

He scribbled desperately in his notebook, and the general said, "Why not a tape recorder?"

"I had one, but I got too close to one of those 915 mm. howitzers. Now, general, when you explained the theory of distraction warfare, you said 'according to the book.' Is there another explanation?"

"Sure. Have you ever heard of Sheridan's ride?"

"I've heard of it, but I don't know what it was."

"Sheridan's troops were defeated by a Confederate force under the command of Early. Sheridan was away at the time, but rode to the battlefield, turning his retreating troops back as he went. When he reached the battlefield,

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he found Early's troops, who were suffering from want and hunger, plundering his camp. While they were still in a state of disorder, Sheridan attacked and routed them. Throughout history, armies capable of standing great deprivation have been *torn apart by sudden plenty* and then quickly defeated. This has almost always happened by accident. The present idea is to use it *on purpose*. So far, it seems to be working. But believe me, it goes against the grain."

"But, doesn't this method strengthen the enemy?"

"What — liquor, cigarets and cameras, delivered to him when he needs maximum alertness? Strengthen him? How?"

"Don't you ever use food?"

"Certainly, after we've got control of the place, or for some definite purpose. The idea is to cause the maximum distraction at just the time he can least afford it, if you follow me."

The correspondent frowned, and nodded. The general glanced briefly at the screens, then looked back at the correspondent. Somewhere, the general had heard the saying, "He is a fool who cannot hide his wisdom." Now, was this correspondent really such a dolt as he seemed to be, or was he merely *seeming* to be a dolt in order to get his victim to lower his guard. And *then* what would happen? Would he send back such a report that the do-gooders would all complain because the poor Kazang rebels were being fed liquor instead of a balanced diet?

"Ah — " said the correspondent — " these reports of — immoral practices — "

"What reports of immoral practices?"

"There have been rumors."

"Get to the point."

"Well, it's said that on some battlefields, beautiful women have been driven along ahead of the troops."

"That was the Kazang's stunt, not ours."

"H'm. Well — "

The general glanced at his watch. A few moments before, he'd noticed another screen flicker on. That view was of the pass. Out of the corner of his eye, he took occasional glances at the screen as the correspondent asked more and yet more questions: Was this method moral? Was it humane? Wasn't it really, in a way, more cruel than to shoot a man? Was it *fair*? Meanwhile, disorganization at the pass progressed rapidly. Now the attacking troops approached, ignoring the liquor with a disinterest that spoke volumes for the regulation chemical in their bloodstreams that would make them sick if

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they drank that particular brand. And then the troops were in the pass.

Somewhere the TV observers watched the effect of the bombardment further ahead, taking pains to see that the bombardment was accurate, as usual, and that it was having a real and not only an imagined effect. But that collection of staggering drunks, guns lost or slung at their shoulders, packs bulging and bottles in both hands gave testimony that Intelligence had correctly estimated the tastes and psychology of the Kazang ordinary soldier. The best general officer of the Kazang, back at that crossroad, was another matter. Again General Hardisty glanced at his watch.

". . . so don't you feel," the correspondent was saying, "that really this is a heartless and callous exploitation of human weakness, human frailty, to subvert the mind and morals of your opponent from his true loyalty, to degrade . . ."

"Phew," said the general. "Not enemy, but *opponent*. How did you degrade an opponent who delights in torture, who in peacetime considers himself clever if he strains ditch-water for a particular type of intestinal parasite, then bribes a servant to put it in his competitor's food? We are supposed to use only the most knightly of methods, while our own men are carried off by the thousands, bloated from barbed darts, smeared with the dung of specially infected monkeys? Is that your argument?"

"Well, of course, they are primitive. It's up to us — "

The conviction was gaining ground with the general that this particular correspondent actually was a real, genuine, Grade-A boob. In that case, the fellow's boobishness could be put to use.

". . . if not more honorable," he was saying now, "to first send them a note stating clearly your own intentions and frankly asking them for theirs. Then you could *offer* them, freely and openly, an equivalent amount of goods to what you are using now. That is, *if* they would agree to step back a distance, as it were. Then, they would get something, and we would get something, and it would be honest and aboveboard, and both would profit."

"How?"

"Why, in that they would give a little, and we would give a little, and — "

"And when they wanted more, they'd grab territory, and we'd bribe them to give part of it back again?"

"Well, what's the difference between that and this present method?"

"This present method does *not*

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give them what they need to make trouble. It gives them what the individual soldier momentarily *wants*. What they need and what they want can be two entirely different things. We use that fact to split them wide open. While they're split wide open, we move in. Before they know what hit them, we do our best to set up an honest government, which is something this country hasn't seen for the last one thousand years."

The correspondent appeared momentarily dazed.

The general glanced at his watch, and frowned. "Outside, the artillery should be getting set pretty soon to let fly with those D-charges. Better stay down here when they load them."

The correspondent looked crafty and shot out the door and up the stairs.

The general shook his head. A genuine boob. Already, on one of the screens, the first of the gigantic howitzers was rolling toward the pass. By the time the fellow got to the spot where the big howitzers *had* been, they'd be set up elsewhere, and the view would then be coming in on the screen.

The general watched the screen with interest. Aleardy the road junction was coming into view as the drones moved forward. For such a valuable piece of real estate, it didn't look like much. To left and right, the north-south road, a long strip of dust, stretched out over the mountain slopes, high above the low, wet ground. Straight ahead, the east-west road gradually descended from the pass onto the one reasonably solid causeway through swamp and jungle to the neighboring state of Cuchang. The Cuchang and Kazang mutually despised each other, and if one threatened to make progress, the other kicked his feet out from under him out of sheer jealousy. But, having the same religion, they obviously might unite to flatten any outsider with the gall to bring a new idea into the region. It followed, the general concluded, that he had better get a firm grip on that nearby narrow gateway from Cuchang into Kazang. Unfortunately, the Kazang had a general of their own who had already got a grip on this road center and intended to keep it himself. How to pry him loose?

Already, the screens showed that the pass, from end to end, and the nearby slopes dominating it were in friendly hands. Already, the bombardment of the road center — using these shells originally intended to shoot supplies into besieged outposts — was producing a whirl of gaily colored parachutes.

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But not a single individual reached out to sample the temptations offered him.

Obviously the enemy general had his troops well under control.

There was a faint distinct jolt underfoot.

Someone murmured, "There go the nine-fifteens."

On the screen, a new type of shell spun down, the sunlight flashing on its whirling rotors. Then another and another dropped down, till they seemed to be landing everywhere.

General Hardisty watched closely. This was the acid test.

From behind him, a familiar voice said, "Those are the D charges?"

"Yes."

The correspondent said, "What's going on?" He sounded intent and serious.

The general said, "Whoever has that crossroad controls whether troops move north and south on that road and whether they go east and west on the Cuchang road."

"Can't they go cross-country?"

"Yes, of course, but the country is bad. The Kazang general who had that road junction wants to hold it till help can come across from Cuchang. We want to take it away from him. But he's dug in. If he can hold it till the Cuchang get their armor across, he can make trouble for us. We have to split his position wide open *now*. Once we break up his position, we can get through to blow up the causeway. This will present the Cuchang with something of a problem."

"But how are you going to capture that position, if their general can keep his troops in order? But, then, how can he control — "

General Hardisty watched the screens. "Either he's convinced them that anything we send is poisoned, or he's got some special troops who'll shoot anyone they see so much as reach for the stuff."

"So these D charges are to crack their resistance?"

"That's the idea."

"What are they? Explosives?"

"No."

"Gas shells? Tear gas?"

"No."

"You say they're *live*, right?"

"That's right."

"Hordes of plague rats?"

Hardesty snorted. "That would be bright, wouldn't it? We're here, too. Wouldn't it be shrewd of us to start a thing like that with us in the middle of it?"

"Then what *is* inside?"

"Bear in mind, we supply what they want. Not necessarily what they *need*, but what they *want*. What does any soldier of any nationality, with weeks of hard

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labor and deprivation behind him, and stuck in some desolate hole — what does he want?"

"I don't — "

On a nearby screen, a tall figure appeared out of the ground, walked slowly out toward one of the brightly-colored "shells," and turned to shake his fist. He appeared to be looking out of the screen almost straight at Hardisty. Silver insignia glinted at his collar as he glared angrily back toward the pass. Then he bent at one of the shells, worked a release of some kind, and the top swung up.

A slender woman in a long black dress slit up both sides rose up out of the shell and threw her arms around him.

General Hardisty glanced at the correspondent. "That's his wife. We captured her two weeks ago." He studied the correspondent's face. "We only get the best value out of these D shells toward the end of a campaign, and a lot depends on Intelligence."

The correspondent stared at the screen. Men were appearing from the earth like ants and snapping open the big shells. Out of each climbed someone the men seemed very glad to see.

"How do they know — "

"Each of those shells has a loudspeaker; each one is labeled, and this bombardment was preceded by dropping leaflets and an armored broadcast speaker."

The general smiled. "So now you see, we reunite families, and promote romance, at considerable expense to ourselves. Isn't *that* considerate of us?"

The screen had taken on the look of a huge picnic. Into the midst of this reunion dropped a barrage of freshly heated food, swinging on parachutes.

And in the midst of the confusion, there raced down the road in a cloud of dust half-a-dozen loaded jeeps with no drivers visible. The first four blew up. The last two bounced, crashed, swerved, made it to the crossroad and started back.

"Remote-control," said the general. "To check for mines."

The two remaining jeeps again roared up the road, and this time successive little groups of jeeps boiled up the road after them, bristling with guns. Behind the jeeps came a gigantic howitzer.

From the direction of the jungle swamp and Cuchang, a big tank crawled up the road. Then, as the driver got a look at the howitzer, the tank turned around and headed back to Cuchang again.

"Just barely in time," said the general.

The correspondent was still staring at the reunited families,

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feasting on the specially provided meal fired at them in place of bullets.

"Phew," he said. "Now I see it. It's all calculated. They always get what they want when it so happens that what they want will wreck their position. Holy — "

Then his eyes widened even further.

The general nodded. Not a boob after all, he thought. Now, had he earlier just made believe he was a boob?

Or had he actually been one, and now the shock had jolted him out of it?

"And," said the correspondent, "*that's* the flaw!"

"The what?"

"What's wrong with this. The lang-range drawback of the short-range advantages you spoke of."

The general nodded slowly. "And what is that?"

"What happens," said the correspondent slowly, "is we make this *too* satisfactory, *too* painless. Just suppose — "

The general listened critically. Here it came. The very thing that he had to throw out of his mind every night in order to get a little sleep.

"Here we are," said the correspondent, "trying not to be brutal. We've hit on a system that actually makes it *pleasant* for the opposition to get beat. It's an expensive method, but wars are always expensive. The difference with our method is it's comparatively bloodless and even pleasant. It's designed to *make no unnecessary enemies.* Half the trouble in the world comes from the enemies you made in the last fight."

"Yes," said the general. "That's it. And — "

"And," said the correspondent, "now that we've got this comparatively bloodless, pleasant way of waging war, this is still ruinously expensive, however, what do we do if — "

The general nodded. "Go on."

"What do we do," the correspondent concluded, "if we *make it so pleasant that everyone wants to fight us?*"

On the screen, the liquor bottles whirled past like snowflakes in a blizzard. The correspondent listened alertly, and the general listened with him.

But no one stepped forward to provide an answer to that question.

— CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

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NON-FACT ARTICLE

THE DISCOVERY OF THE NULLITRON

Results of an Experiment Conducted by Thomas M. Disch & John T. Sladek

Whilst attempting a verification of Drake's classical "Massless Muon" experiment (the experiment in which a massless muon was annihilated, producing, as Hawakaja had earlier observed, the supposed "isotron"), a new particle was observed, having a mass of 0, a charge of 0 and a spin of 0. This particle has been termed the "nullitron."

An Important Breakthrough

At first the nullitron was thought to be a neutrino — or massless, uncharged particle with a spin of $+1/2$ — but when the experiment was repeated using a gyroscopically balanced nubium target in place of the old, fixed frimium one, the spin was calculated to be zero.

Though having no mass, the particle cannot be truly termed subatomic, for it appears to be about one meter in diameter, perfectly round and rather shiny. Its red color can be explained by the well known "red-shift" or "Doppler" effect, caused by the fact that no matter from what vantage the particle is viewed, it seems to be retreating from the observer uniformly at the speed of light.

Whence the Nullitron? Whither Bound?

The nullitron can be produced experimentally only under the most favoring circumstances. A cyclotron one mile in circumference filled with alternate solid blocks of lead and quicksilver is useful but not essential. Of ut-

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most importance is a willingness on the part of the investigator to discover them.*

With the discovery of the anti-nullitron a great leap forward has been made in the general area of investigation concerning the nullitron.

A Great Leap Forward

Like the nullitron itself, the anti-nullitron has a mass of 0, a charge of 0 and a spin of 0, but, unlike the nullitron, it is green and cubical. The most careful measurements (obtained by passing the nullitrons and anti-nullitrons through a dense field of spinning neutrinos, upon which they have curiously little effect, or none) show that the cubical anti-nullitrons are of exactly equal volume to the spherical nullitrons. No satisfactory explanation has yet been offered for this phenomenon.

Theoretical considerations lead to the inexorable if highly unlikely conclusion that nullitrons and anti-nullitrons exist everywhere in nature. Indeed, the universe can be said to be drenched with them. Due to the laws of conservation, however, they are rarely observable in their natural state, since the nullitrons cancel out the anti-nullitrons and *vice versa*.

Not without Significance

This does not mean, however, that the nullitron is not without significance. On the contrary, the nullitron is known to be in constant interaction with all known subatomic particles. A nullitron can join with a neutrino to form an anti-neutrino and with an anti-neutrino to form a neutrino. These interactions (and many more besides) are occurring constantly in nature, but (due again to the laws of conservation) can never be observed directly, only inferred.

Aside from their "color," the nullitron family possesses certain other "secondary" characteristics:

The sound of two nullitrons colliding from opposite directions is a whirring noise, very much like that of a defective electric fan. (Such as the fan to be found in Room 3B in the *Las Palmas* hotel in Ibiza.) The collision of two anti-nullitrons, by contrast, produces exactly the same sound with the exception that in profile upon an oscilloscope the troughs of one pattern corres-

* The first nullitron was observed, in point of fact, on the isle of Ibiza, where the investigators had repaired for a brief holiday. For three successive afternoons, while sleeping on the beach, Mr. Sladek had vivid dreams of swarms of nullitrons that formed into rings, biting each other's tails and eventually melting into butter.

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pond perfectly to the crests of the other, and *vice versa*. The result, from an auditory point of view, is a perfect silence, which may account for the fact that the nullitron has waited so long to be discovered.

Uses of the Nullitron

In respect to taste, the nullitron, despite its striking red hue, has a distinct flavor of licorice, while the anti-nullitron tastes like nothing so much as the unripe berries of the juniper. Further investigations are being carried out in this fruitful field, and already manufacturers of dietetic foods have expressed interest in the possible commercial uses. The chief problem confronting industry is the extraction of nullitrons from their "potential field" in sufficient quantity.

Of the possible employment in warfare (and particularly whether a "nullitron-bomb" is feasible at this point or in the near future) nothing can be said with any confidence.

Space, Time, and the Nullitron

One of the most curious aspects of the nullitron is its relatively short life. In all cases observed the nullitron was instantly and utterly annihilated at the moment of its creation. This was not apparent during the early investigations, because the demolished nullitron is instantly replaced by another identical nullitron, indistinguishable from its "parent" in all respects.

The first task which presented itself to investigators after the discovery of the nullitron itself was the splitting of the nullitron into subparticles. This experiment consisted simply of catching nullitrons and hurling them with considerable force against a floor. While too little energy in the "nullitron-beam" thus formed can cause a troublesome wobble, too much force will result in excessive bouncing — the by now well known "Bounce Effect." This troublesome elasticity is most easily overcome by first embedding the nullitron in a casing of pi-mesons and then "letting Nature take its inevitable course."

While over seventeen thousand separate types of subnullitronic particles have been discovered by this method as of the time of this report, the difficulty in distinguishing between these different types was great, since all the different subtypes created by this method appeared to be identical.

Clearly, a more sophisticated approach was needed.

The method finally arrived at by trial and error was as follows:

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While one investigator holds the nullitron in both his hands, the other investigator either sits upon it or strikes it a sharp blow with a molybdenum hammer. Two main categories of subnull particles are produced so: the "sit-upons" and the "others."

The "sit-upons" consist of isons (small, blue and round); nisons (smaller, two dimensional particles of a curious rice color); and null-nisons (*extremely* tiny, orange and of fanciful shapes).

The "others" are more varied, falling into two main subgroupings — the isotrons and the phlogistons. The isotrons are medium-sized, ovoid, semi-massless particles which upon creation can be observed to tend immediately to the nearest light source (at *Las Palmas* this was a single, bare, 25-watt bulb) and buzz about it until swatted or consumed by anti-isotrons.

Countless "other" particles were observed, ranging in size from 1/8 inch to the great phlogistons, which are fully 1,800,000 kilometers in diameter, though in mass equivalent to an electron. Only one phlogiston has been produced experimentally. This particle, being photophiliac, sped immediately toward the sun at an estimated velocity .9 the speed of light.

A Possible Explanation of Matter?

The single phlogiston produced in this last, and definitive, experiment may eventually afford us an explanation of the nature of matter. On its collision with the sun, the phlogiston was annihilated, as well as the sun, and a number of interesting photographs were taken.

While it is still too early to begin to speculate on this phenomenon, one may look forward to the day when, with a fuller understanding of the wonderful nullitron, we shall possess a new and more comprehensive explanation of the nature of our "solar system" if not of "matter" itself. —THOMAS M. DISCH & JOHN T. SLADEK

THE PLANET WRECKERS

by Keith Laumer

This and many others in the February *Worlds of Tomorrow* — on sale now!

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Thus We Frustrate Charlemagne

by R. A. LAFFERTY

We detested Today — so naturally we edited Yesterday to suit us!

"We've been on some tall ones," said Gregory Smirnov of the Instiute, "but we've never stood on the edge of a bigger one than this, nor viewed one with shakier expectations. Still, if the calculations of Epiktistes are correct, this will work."

"People, it will work," Epikt said.

This was Epiktistes the Ktistec machine? Who'd have believed it? The main bulk of Epikt was five floors below them, but he had run an extension of himself up to this little penthouse lounge. All it took was a cable, no more than a yard in diameter, and a functional head set on the end of it.

And what a head he chose! It was a sea-serpent head, a dragon head, five feet long and copied from an old carnival float. Epikt had also given himself human speech of a sort, a blend of Irish and Jewish and Dutch comedian patter from ancient vaudeville. Epikt was a comic to his last para-DNA relay when he rested his huge, boggle-eyed, crested head on the table there and smoked the biggest stogies ever born.

But he was serious about this project.

"We have perfect test conditions," the machine Epikt said as though calling them to order. "We set out basic texts, and we take careful note of the world as it is. If the world changes, then the texts should change here before our eyes. For our test plot, we have taken that portion of our own middle-sized city that can be viewed from this fine vantage point. If the world in its past-present continuity is changed by our meddling, then

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the face of our city will also change instantly as we watch it.

"We have assembled here the finest minds and judgments in the world: eight humans and one Ktistec machine, myself. Remember that there are nine of us. It might be important."

The nine finest minds were: Epiktistes, the transcendent machine who put the "K" in Ktistec; Gregory Smirnov, the large-souled director of the Institute; Valery Mok, an incandescent lady scientist; her over-shadowed and over-intelligent husband Charles Cogsworth; the humorless and inerrant Glasser; Aloysius Shiplap, the seminal genius; Willy McGilly, a man of unusual parts (the seeing third finger on his left hand he had picked up on one of the planets of Kapteyn's Star) and no false modesty; Audifex O'Hanlon; and Diogenes Pontifex. The latter two men were not members of the Institute (on account of the Minimal Decency Rule), but when the finest minds in the world are assembled, these two cannot very well be left out.

"We are going to tamper with one small detail in past history and note its effect," Gregory said. "This has never been done before openly. We go back to an era that has been called 'A patch of light in the vast gloom,' the time of Charlemagne. We consider why that light went out and did not kindle others. The world lost four hundred years by that flame expiring when the tinder was apparently ready for it. We go back to that false dawn of Europe and consider where it failed. The year was 778, and the region was Spain. Charlemagne had entered alliance with Marsilies, the Arab king of Saragossa, against the Caliph Abd ar-Rahmen of Cordova. Charlemagne took such towns as Pamplona, Huesca and Gerona and cleared the way to Marsilies in Saragossa. The Caliph accepted the situation. Saragossa should be independent, a city open to both Moslems and Christians. The northern marches to the border of France should be permitted their Christianity, and there would be peace for everybody.

"This Marsilies had long treated Christians as equals in Saragossa, and now there would be an open road from Islam into the Frankish Empire. Marsilies gave Charlemagne thirty-three scholars (Moslem, Jewish and Christian) and some Spanish mules to seal the bargain. And there could have been a cross-fertilization of cultures.

"But the road was closed at Roncevalles where the rearguard of Charlemagne was ambushed and destroyed on its way back to France. The ambushers were more Basque than Moslems,

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but Charlemagne locked the door at the Pyrenees and swore that he would not let even a bird fly over that border thereafter. He kept the road closed, as did his son and his grandsons. But when he sealed off the Moslem world, he also sealed off his own culture.

"In his later years he tried a revival of civilization with a ragtag of Irish half-scholars, Greek vagabonds and Roman copyists who almost remembered an older Rome. These weren't enough to revive civilization, and yet Charlemagne came close with them. Had the Islam door remained open, a real revival of learning might have taken place then rather than four hundred years later. We are going to arrange that the ambush at Roncevalles did not happen and that the door between the two civilizations was not closed. Then we will see what happens to us."

"Instrusion like a burglar bent," said Epikt.

"Who's a burglar?" Glasser demanded.

"I am," Epikt said. "We all are. It's from an old verse. I forget the author; I have it filed in my main mind downstairs if you're interested."

"We set out a basic text of Hilarius," Gregory continued. "We note it carefully, and we must remember it the way it is. Very soon, that may be the way it *was*. I believe that the words will change on the very page of this book as we watch them. Just as soon as we have done what we intend to do."

The basic text marked in the open book read:

"The traitor Gano, playing a multiplex game, with money from the Cordova Caliph hired Basque Christians (dressed as Saragossan Mozarabs) to ambush the rear-guard of the Frankish force. To do this it was necessary that Gano keep in contact with the Basques and at the same time delay the rear-guard of the Franks. Gano, however, served both as guide and scout for the Franks. The ambush was effected. Charlemagne lost his rear-guard, his scholars and his Spanish mules. And he locked the door against the Moslem world."

That was the text by Hilarius.

"When we, as it were, push the button (give the nod to Epiktistes), this will be changed," Gregory said. "Epikt, by a complex of devices which he has assembled, will send an Avatar (party of mechanical and partly of ghostly construction), and something will have happened to the traitor Gano along about sundown one night on the road to Roncevalles."

"I hope the Avatar isn't expensive," Willy McGilly said.

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"When I was a boy we got by with a dart whittled out of slippery elm wood."

"This is no place for humor," Glasser protested. "Who did you, as a boy, ever kill in time. Willy?"

"Lots of them. King Wu of the Manchu, Pope Adrian VII, President Hardy of our own country, King Marcel of Auvergne, the philosopher Gabriel Toeplitz. It's a good thing we got them. They were a bad lot."

"But I never heard of any of them, Willy," Glasser insisted.

"Of course not. We killed them when they were kids."

"Enough of your fooling, Willy," Gregory cut it off.

"Willy's not fooling," the machine Epikt said. "Where do you think I got the idea?"

"'Regard the world," Aloysius said softly. "We see our own middle-sized town with half a dozen towers of pastel-colored brick. We will watch it as it grows or shrinks. It will change if the world changes."

"There's two shows in town I haven't seen," Valery said. "Don't let them take them away! After all, there are only three shows *in* town."

"We regard the Beautiful Arts as set out in the reviews here which we also taken as basic texts," Audifax O'Hanlon said. "You can say what you want to, but the arts have never been in meaner shape. Painting is of three schools only, all of them bad. Sculpture is the heaps-of-rusted-metal school and the obscene tinker-toy erectives. The only popular art, graffiti on mingitorio walls, has become unimaginative, stylized and ugly.

"The only thinkers to be thought of are the dead Teilhard de Chardin and the stillborn Sartre, Zielinski, Aichinger. Oh well, if you're going to laugh there's no use going on."

"All of us here are experts on something," Cogsworth said. "Most of us are experts on everything. We know the world as it is. Let us do what we are going to do and then look at the world."

"Push the button, Epikt!" Gregory Smirnov ordered.

From his depths, Epiktistes the Ktistec machine sent out an Avatar, partly of mechanical and partly of ghostly construction. Along about sundown on the road from Pamplona to Roncevalles, on August 14th of the year 778, the traitor Gano was taken up from the road and hanged on a carob tree, the only one in those groves of oak and bench. And all things therafter were changed.

"Did it work, Epikt? Is it done?" Louis Lobachevski demanded. "I can't see a change in anything."

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"The Avatar is back and reports his mission accomplished," Epikt stated. "I can't see any change in anything either."

"Let's look at the evidence," Gregory said.

The thirteen of them, the ten humans and the Ktistec, Chresmoeidec and Proaisthematic machines, turned to the evidence and with mounting disappointment.

"There is not one word changed in the Hilarius text," Gregory grumbled, and indeed the basic text still read:

"The king Marsilies of Saragossa, playing a multiplex game, took money from the Caliph of Cordova for persuading Charlemagne to abandon the conquest of Spain (which Charlemagne had never considered and couldn't have affected); took money from Charlemagne in recompense for the cities of the Northern marches being returned to Christian rule (though Marsilies himself had never ruled them); and took money from everyone as toll on the new trade passing through his city. Marsilies gave up nothing but thirty-three scholars, the same number of mules and a few wagonloads of book-manscripts from the old Hellenistic libraries. But a road over the mountains was opened between the two worlds; and also a sector of the Mediterranean coast became open to both. A limited opening was made between the two worlds, and a limited reanimation of civilization was affected in each."

"No, there is not one word of the text changed," Gregory grumbled. "History followed its same course. How did our experiment fail? We tried, by a device that seems a little cloudy now, to shorten the gestation period for the new birth. It would not be shortened."

"The town is in no way changed," said Aloysius Shiplap. "It is still a fine large town with two dozen imposing towers of varicolored limestone and midland marble. It is a vital metropolis, and we all love it, but it is now as it was before."

"There are still two dozen good shows in town that I haven't seen," Valery said happily as she examined the billings. "I was afraid that something might have happened to them."

"There is no change at all in the Beautiful Arts as reflected in the reviews here that we have taken as basic texts," said Audifax O'Hanlon. "You can say what you want to, but the arts have never been in finer shape."

"It's a link of sausage," said the machine Chresmoeidy.

"'Nor know the road who never ran it thrice,'" said the machine Proaisth. "That's from an old verse; I forget the author; I

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have it filed in my main mind in England if you're interested."

"Oh yes, it's the three-cornered tale that ends where it begins," said the machine Epiktistes. "But it is good sausage, and we should enjoy it; many ages have not even this much."

"What are you fellows babbling about?" Audifax asked without really wanting to know. "The art of painting is still almost incandescent in its bloom. The schools are like clustered galaxies, and half the people are doing some of this work for pleasure. Scandanavian and Maori sculpture are hard put to maintain their dominance in the field where almost everything is extraordinary. The impassioned-comic has released music from most of its bonds. Since speculative mathematics and psychology have joined the popular performing arts, there is considerably more sheer fun in life.

"There's a piece here on Pete Teilhard putting him into context as a talented science-fiction writer with a talent for outre burlesque. The Brainworld Motif was overworked when he tackled it, but what a shaggy comic extravaganza he did make of it! And there's Muldoom, Zielinski, Popper, Gander, Aichinger, Whitecrow, Hornwhanger — we owe so much to the juice of the cultists! In the main line there are whole congeries and continents of great novels and novelists.

"An ever popular art, graffiti on mingitorio walls, maintains its excellence. Travel Unlimited offers a ninety-nine day art tour of the world keyed to the viewing of the exquisite and hilarious miniatures on the walls of its own rest-rooms. Ah, what a copious world we live in!"

"It's more grass than we can graze," said Willy McGilly. "The very bulk of achievement is stupefying. Ah, I wonder if there is subtle revenge in my choice of words. The experiment, of course, was a failure, and I'm glad. I like a full world."

"We will not call the experiment a failure since we have covered only a third of it," said Gregory. "Tomorrow we will make our second attempt on the past. And, if there is a present left to us after that, we will make a third attempt the following day."

"Shove it, good people, shove it," the machine Epiktistes said. "We will meet here again tomorrow. Now you to your pleasures, and we to ours."

The people talked that evening away from the machines where they could make foolish conjectures without being laughed at.

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"Let's pull a random card out of the pack and go with it," said Louis Lobachevski. "Let's take a purely intellectual crux of a little later date and see if the changing of it will change the world."

"I suggest Ockham," said Johnny Konduly.

"Why?" Valery demanded. "He was the last and least of the medieval schoolmen. How could anything he did or did not do affect anything?"

"Oh no, he held the razor to the jugular," Gregory said. "He'd have severed the vein if the razor hadn't been snatched from his hand. There is something amiss here, though. It is as though I remembered when things were not so stark with Ockam, as though, in some variant, Ockham's Terminalism did not mean what we know that it did mean."

"Sure, let's cut the jugular," said Willy. "Let's find out the logical termination of Terminalism and see just how deep Ockham's razor can cut."

"We'll do it," said Gregory. "Our world has become something of a fat slob; it cloys; it has bothered me all evening. We will find whether purely intellectual attitudes are of actual effect. We'll leave the details to Epikt, but I believe the turning point was in the year 1323 when John Lutterell came from Oxford to Avignon where the Holy See was then situated. He brought with him fifty-six propositions taken from Ockham's Commentary on the Sentences, and he proposed their condemnation. They were not condemned outright, but Ockham was whipped soundly in that first assualt, and he never recovered. Lutterell proved that Ockham's nihilism was a bunch of nothing. And the Ockham thing did die away, echoing dimly through the little German courts where Ockham traveled peddling his wares, but he no longer peddled them in the main markets. Yet his view point could have sunk the world if, indeed, intellectual attitudes are of actual effect."

"We wouldn't have liked Lutterell," said Aloysius. "He was humorless and he had no fire in him, and he was always right. And we would have liked Ockham. He was charming, and he was wrong, and perhaps we will destroy the world yet. There's a chance that we will get our reaction if we allow Ockham free hand. China was frozen for thousands of years by an intellectual attitude, one not nearly so unsettling as Ockham's. India is hypnotized into a queer stasis which calls itself revolutionary and which does not move — hypnotized by an intellectual attitude. But there was never such an attitude as Ockham's."

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So they decided that the former chancellor of Oxford, John Lutterell, who was always a sick man, should suffer one more sickness on the road to Avignon in France, and that he should not arrive there to lance the Ockham thing before it infected the world.

"Let's get on with it, good people," Epikt rumbled the next day. "Me, I'm to stop a man getting from Oxford to Avignon in the year 1323. Well, come, come, take your places, and let's get the thing started." And Epiktistes's great sea-serpent head glowed every color as he puffed on a seven-branched pooka-dooka and filled the room with wonderful smoke.

"Everybody ready to have his throat cut?" Gregory asked cheerfully.

"Cut them," said Diogenes Pontifex, "but I haven't much hope for it. If our yesterday's essay had no effect, I cannot see how on English schoolman chasing another to challenge him in an Italian court in France, in bad Latin, nearly seven hundred years ago, on fifty-six points of unscientific abstract reasoning, can have effect."

"We have perfect test conditions here," said the machine Epikt. "We set out a basic text from Cobblestone's History of Philosophy. If our test is effective, then the text will change before our eyes. So will every other text, and the world.

"We have assembled here the finest minds and judgments in the world," the machine Epiktistes said, "ten humans and three machines. Remember that there are thirteen of us. It might be important."

"Regard the world," said Aloysius Shiplap. "I said that yesterday, but it is required that I say it again. We have the world in our eyes and in our memories. If it changes in any way, we will know it."

"Push the button, Epikt," said Gregory Smirnov.

From his depths, Epiktistes the Ktistec machine sent our an Avatar, partly of mechanical and partly of ghostly construction. And along about sundown on the road from Mende to Avignon in the old Languedoc district of France, in the year 1323, John Lutterell was stricken with one more sickness. He was taken to a little inn in the mountain country, and perhaps he died there. He did not, at any rate, arrive at Avignon.

"Did it work, Epikt? Is it done?" Aloysius asked.

"Let's look at the evidence," said Gregory.

The four of them, the three hu-

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mans and the ghost Epikt who was a kachenko mask with a speaking tube, turned to the evidence with mounting disappointment.

"There is still the stick and the five notches in it," said Gregory. "It was our test stick. Nothing in the world is changed."

"The arts remain as they were," said Aloysius. "Our picture here on the stone on which we have worked for so many seasons is the same as it was. We have painted the bears black, the buffalos red and the people blue. When we find a way to make another color, we can represent birds also. I had hoped that our experiment might give us that other color. I had even dreamed that birds might appear in the picture on the rock before our very eyes."

"There's still rump of skunk to eat and nothing else," said Valery. "I had hoped that our experiment would have changed it to haunch of deer."

"All is not lost," said Aloysius. "We still have the hickory nuts. That was my last prayer before we began our experiment. 'Don't let them take the hickory nuts away,' I prayed."

They sat around the conference table that was a large flat natural rock, and cracked hickory nuts with stone fist-hammers. They were nude in the crude, and the world was as it had always been. They had hoped my magic to change it.

"Epikt has failed us," said Gregory. "We made his frame out of the best sticks, and we plaited his face out of the finest weeds and grasses. We chanted him full of magic and placed all our special treasures in his cheek pouches. So, what can the magic mask do for us now?"

"Ask it, ask it," said Valery. They were the four finest minds in the world — the three humans, Gregory, Aloysius and Valery (the *only* humans in the world unless you count those in the other valleys), and the ghost Epikt, a kachenko mask with a speaking tube.

"What do we do now, Epikt?" Gregory asked. Then he went around behind Epikt to the speaking tube.

"I remember a woman with a sausage stuck to her nose," said Epikt in the voice of Gregory. "Is that any help?"

"It may be some help," Gregory said after he had once more taken his place at the flat-rock conference table. "It is from an old (What's old about it? I made it up myself this morning) folk tale about the three wishes."

"Let Epikt tell it," said Valery. "He does it so much better than you do." Valery went behind Epikt to the speaking tube and

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blew smoke through it from the huge loose black-leaf uncured stogie that she was smoking.

"The wife wastes one wish for a sausage," said Epikt in the voice of Valery. "A sausage is a piece of deer-meat tied in a piece of a deer's stomach. The husband is angry that the wife has wasted a wish, since she could have wished for a whole deer and had many sausages. He gets so angry that he wishes the sausage might stick to her nose forever. It does, and the woman wails, and the man realized that he had used up the second wish. I forget the rest."

"You can't forget it, Epikt!" Aloysius cried in alarm. "The future of the world may depend on your remembering. Here, let me reason with that damned magic mask!" And Aloysius went behind Epikt to the speaking tube.

"Oh yes, now I remember," Epikt said in the voice of Aloysius. "The man used the third wish to get the sausage off his wife's nose. So things were the way they had been before."

"But we don't want it the way it was before!" Valery howled. "That's the way it is now, rump of skunk to eat, and me with nothing to wear but my ape cape. We want it better. We want deer skins and antelope skins."

"Take me as a mystic or don't take me at all," Epikt signed off.

"Even though the world has always been so, yet we have intimations of other things," Gregory said. "What folk hero was it who made the dart? And of what did he make it?"

"Willy McGilly was the folk hero," said Epikt in the voice of Valery, who had barely got to the speaking tube in time, "and he made it out of slippery elm wood."

"Could we make a dart like the folk hero Willy made?" Aloysius asked.

"We gotta," said Epikt.

"Could we make a slinger and whip it out of our own context and into —"

"We gotta," said Epikt.

"Could we kill an Avatar with it before he killed somebody else?" Gregory asked excitedly.

"We sure will try," said the ghost Epikt who was nothing but a kachenko mask with a speaking tube. "I never did like those Avatars."

You *think* Epikt was nothing but a kachenko mask with a speaking tube! There was a lot more to him than that. He had red garnet rocks inside him and real sea salt. He had powder made from beaver eyes. He had rattlesnake rattles and armadillo shields. He was the first Ktistec machine.

"Give me the word, Epikt," Aloysius cried a few moments

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later as he fitted the dart to the slinger.

"Fling it! Get that Avatar fink!" Epikt howled.

Along about sundown in an unnumbered year, on the Road from Nowhere to Eom, an Avatar fell dead with a slippery-elm dart in his heart.

"Did it work, Epikt? Is it done?" Charles Cogsworth asked in excitement. "It must have. I'm here. I wasn't in the last one."

"Let's look at the evidence," Gregory suggested calmly.

"Damn the evidence!" Willy McGilly cussed. "Remember where you heard it first."

"Is it started yet?" Glasser asked.

"Is it finished?" Audifax O'Hanlon questioned.

"Push the button, Epikt!" Diogenes barked. "I think I missed part of it. Let's try it again."

"Oh, no, no!" Valery forbade. "Not again. That way is rump of skunk and madness."

— R. A. LAFFERTY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Hayden Howard's stories of the Eskimo invasion of the world come to their climax in the next issue of *Galaxy* with a complete short novel called *The Purpose of Life*. We've been reading the mail on this unusual series with unusual interest; apparently the cumulative effect of the series has been to arouse both curiosity and excitement. What are the Esks? How did they come to Earth? And, above all, *why*? We're happy to tell you that in the next issue of *Galaxy* you'll get all the answers. . . .

You'll also get an unusually good novelette by Keith Laumer called *Thunderhead*. Curious thing about Laumer. Best known for his mordant and comic Retief series, he isn't usually thought of as the kind of writer who can evoke emotions. But we have it on the testimony of some rather hard-bitten readers that now and then he has been able to move them very deeply; and we have a notion that *Thunderhead* is the kind of story that will do that again.

We've also a specially bright and bushy-tailed bunch of short pieces by Kris Neville, Christopher Anvil, C. C. MacApp and others — some of them will likely fit in the next issue, though we don't yet know which. Good issue. We recommend it.

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CONCLUSION

THE PALACE OF LOVE

by JACK VANCE

Illustrated by MORROW

He had tracked his quarry across the galaxy. Revenge was near — if only he could learn which man was his foe!

XX

Behind the hotel waited a long omnibus with six bladder wheels and a canopy of rosy pink silk. Amid banter, laughing and repartee, the guests — eleven men, ten women — climbed aboard and settled themselves upon cushions of purple satin. The bus trundled across the canal and away to the south; Kouliha with its tall towers was left behind.

For an hour the guests rode past carefully tended farms and orchards, toward a line of wood-

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WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

To one purpose had Keith Gersen dedicated his life: To revenge himself against the Demon Princes of space who had massacred his parents when he was a child. For that he had trained himself in the arts of assassination and intrigue. For that he had given up the comforts of home and family.

Two of the Demon Princes he had already destroyed, but others remained alive, and of them all the deadliest and most hated was Viole Falushe. Gersen followed the trail of Falushe across the galaxy . . . and missed him at every turn. On ancient Earth he set a trap and baited it with the loveliest girl he had ever seen; Falushe escaped it.

But with the aid of the half-mad, drunken poet Navarth, Gersen was able to penetrate the stronghold of Falushe; he obtained an invitation to Falushe's notorious Palace of Love.

There was one drawback. He had secured entry to the Palace of Love. But he had an uneasy suspicion that Falushe knew all about him. Would he be able to get out again as easily?

ed hills, and speculation was rife as to the exact location of the Palace of Love. Hygen Grote went so far as to push into the forward compartment and make inquiry of the gaunt woman in the brown and black uniform who was driving. Hygen Grote was rebuffed and returned to his seat grinning ruefully and shaking his head. Up into the hills rolled the bus, under tall, umbrella-shaped trees with glossy black trunks and green-yellow leaf-disks. From somewhere in the distance came the melodious hooting of tree-dwelling creatures. Enormous white moths fluttered through the shade, which became ever more dank, ever more pungent with the reek of lichens and large-leafed shrubs. At the ridge the

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road broke out into a dramatic blaze of sunlight.

Ahead spread a vast blue ocean. The bus plunged down a steep straight road and halted at a dock. Here waited a glass-hulled yacht with blue decks and a white metal superstructure. Four stewards in dark blue and white uniforms assisted the guests from the bus, conducted them to a building of white coral blocks. Here they were asked to change into new garments: white yachting costumes, with rope sandals, loose white linen caps. The Druids protested vigorously on doctrinal grounds. They flatly refused to part with their cowls; and so they boarded the yacht, the men attired in white trousers and jackets, the women in white skirts and jackets, with heads encowled in black as before.

The time was sunset; the yacht would not get under way until the morrow. The passengers assembled in the saloon, where they were served Earth-type cocktails, and presently dinner. The two younger Druids, Hule and Billika, wore their cowls rather more loosely than their parents, thereby incurring reprimands.

After dinner the three young men, Mario, Tanzel and Ethuen, played deck tennis with Tralla and Mornice. Drusilla huddled disconsolately near Navarth, who conducted the strangest of conversations with Druidess Laidig. Gersen sat to the side watching, propounding speculations, wondering where his responsibilities lay and to whom.

From time to time Drusilla wistfully looked across the saloon toward him. Clearly she dreaded the future — with good reason, thought Gersen. He could think of no way to reassure her. Zuly the dancer, supple as a white eel, walked around the deck with daNossa. Skebou Diffiani the Quantique stood by the rail, thinking the mysterious thoughts of his race, with an occasional contemptuous glance toward daNossa and Zuly.

Billika shyly came up to talk to Drusilla, followed by Hule, who seemed to find Drusilla attractive. Billika, somewhat flushed, had been tasting wine. She wore her cowl artfully disarranged to show her curly brown hair. The situation did not evade the notice of Druidess Laidig — who, however, was unable to detach herself from Navarth.

Margary Liever chatted with Hygen Grote and his companion Doranie, until Doranie became bored and went to saunter along the deck. To Hygen Grote's annoyance, she was joined there by Lerand Wible.

The Druids were the first to

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bed, followed by Hygen Grote and Doranie.

Gersen went out on the deck to look up at the sky, where the stars of Sirneste Cluster blazed. To the south and east heaved the waters of an ocean whose name he did not know. Not far distant Skebou Diffiani leaned on the rail, looking across the same ocean.

Gersen returned within. Drusilla had gone to her stateroom. On the sideboard the stewards had arranged a collation of meats, cheese, fowl, aspic, a selection of wines and liquors.

Zuly conversed in low tones with daNossa. Margary Liever now sat alone, a vague smile on her face; was she not achieving her heart's desire? Navarth had become somewhat drunk and was swaggering about, spoiling for an opportunity to produce a dramatic scene. But everyone else was relaxed and gave him no scope. Navarth finally threw up his hands and went off to bed. Gersen, after a last look around, followed.

Gersen awoke to the pitch and roll of the yacht. The time was shortly after dawn. Sunlight slanted into the cabin through the section of hull above the waterline. Below, dark blue water surged past, not yet illuminated by the sun.

Gersen dressed and went to the saloon, to find himself the earliest riser. Land lay four or five miles off the starboard beam: a narrow beach, a wooded foreshore backed by low hills, with the hint of purple mountains in the distance.

Gersen helped himself to breakfast at the buffet. As he ate other guests appeared, and presently the entire complement sat in the saloon, devouring grills and pastries, drinking hot beverages, marveling at the scenery and the easy motion of the yacht.

After breakfast Gersen went out upon the deck, where he was joined by Navarth, foppish in his white yachting costume. The day was perfect; sunlight glinted on the blue swells; clouds soared above the horizon. Navarth spat over the side, contemplated the sun, the sky, the sea. "The journey begins. It must start like this, innocent and pure."

Gersen understood Navarth's meaning well enough. He made no comment.

Navarth spoke again, in a voice even more gloomy. "No matter what else you say of Vogel, he knows how to do a thing well."

Gersen inspected the gold buttons on his jacket. They seemed no more than buttons. In response to Navarth's puzzled stare he said mildly, "Such articles have been known to conceal spy-cells."

Navarth laughed hoarsely. "Not

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one of them. Is he the man?"

"I don't know. He's starting strong."

XXI

Three days the yacht plied the sunny seas. For Gersen they were three pleasant days, though the hospitality came from a man he intended to kill.

There was an effortless quality to the hours, a dreamlike isolation. Each person's characteristic style was intensified, becoming a thing larger than life. Attitudes and rigidities relaxed. Hule allowed his cowl to hang loose and finally discarded it altogether; Billika, more tentatively, did the same, whereupon Zuly in a spirit of cool mischief offered to arrange her hair. Billika hesitated, then, with a sigh of hedonistic abandon, assented. So Zuly shaped and clipped, to accentuate Billika's pale, wide-eyed delicacy, to the amazement of all the men aboard. Druidess Laidig cried out in anger; Druidess Wust clicked her tongue; the two Druids were startled; but all the others begged them not to browbeat the girl. Such was the atmosphere of ease and gayety that Druidess Laidig at last fell to laughing at Navarth, and Billika managed to slip away quietly.

Not long after, Druidess Laidig allowed her own cowl to hang loose, as presently did Druid Dakaw. Druid Pruitt and Druidess Wust held to the full rigor of their habit, but tolerated the delinquency of the others with no more than an occasional disparaging glance, or muttered sarcasm.

Tralla, Mornice and Doranie, noting the attention paid to the younger girls, became extremely enthusiastic and gay. Clearly none planned to rebuff any attempted gallantry.

Each afternoon the yacht halted to drift on the ocean. All who chose plunged into the clear water, while others went below to watch through the glass hull. These latter included the older Druids, Diffiani (who participated in no activity except eating and drinking), Margray Liever, who professed a fear of deep water, and Hygen Grote, who could not swim. The others, even Navarth, donned the swimsuits provided by the yacht and splashed in the warm ocean.

At dusk of the second evening, Gersen took Drusilla to the bow, refraining from any intimacy or contact which might infuriate Viole Falushe, should he be watching. Drusilla seemed to feel no such constraint, and Gersen became aware, with a bittersweet pang, that the girl was in some degree infatuated with him.

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Gersen, as susceptible as anyone else, fought back his inclinations. Even if he succeeded in destroying Viole Falushe, what then? There was no place for Drusilla in the harsh future he had laid out for himself. Still, the temptation remained. Drusilla, with her somber moods, her sudden flashes of joy, was fascinating.

But circumstances were as they were, and Gersen kept his conversation to the business at hand. Drusilla had noticed nothing. Mario, Ethuen, Tanzel — all plied her with attention. As Gersen had instructed, she showed favoritism to none.

Even as they stood in the bow watching the sunset Mario came to join them. After a moment or two Gersen excused himself, and returned to the promenade. If Mario were Viole Falushe, it would not do to antagonize him. If he were not, then Viole Falushe, watching balefully from elsewhere, would be reassured that Drusilla preferred no single person.

The morning of the fourth day found the yacht cruising among small islands lush with vegetation. At noon the yacht approached the mainland and drifted up to a dock. The voyage was over. The passengers disembarked regretfully, with many a backward glance; Margray Liever frankly wept.

In a structure beside the dock the guests were issued new garments. For the men there were loose velvet blouses in the softest and richest of colors: moss green, cobalt blue, dark maroon, with loose black velvet trousers fastened below the knees with scarlet ribbons. The women received the same style blouses in paler shades, with striped matching skirts. All were issued soft velvet berets, square, loose, with an intriguing tassel.

When all had reassembled, they were served lunch, then ushered to a great wooden wagon with six green and gold wheels, a dark green canopy supported by spiral posts of a beautiful dark wood.

The wagon set off along a coastal road. Late in the afternoon the track veered inland, over rolling grassy hills spangled with flowers, and the ocean was lost to sight.

Soon there were trees, tall and solitary, much like Earth trees, but conceivably indigenous; then clumps and groves. At dusk the wagon halted beside one such grove. The guests were conducted to a hostel built high in the treetops, led along swaying walkways to small wicker tree houses.

Supper was served on the ground to the light of a great crackling fire. The wine seemed stronger than usual, or perhaps

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likely. Vogel may well be aboard, but he won't be eavesdropping. He'd be afraid of hearing something unpleasant."

"You think he's aboard, then?"

"He's aboard, no fear. Would he miss an experience like this? Never! But which is he?"

Gersen considered. "He's not you nor I, nor the Druids. He's not Diffiani."

"He would not be Wible, a different type altogether, too fresh and fair and round. He would not be daNossa, though it's barely possible. Barely possible he's one of the Druids. But I think not."

"That leaves only three. The tall dark men."

"Tanzel, Mario, Ethuen. He could be any of these."

They turned to consider the three men. Tanzel stood at the bow, looking ahead across the ocean. Ethuen sat sprawled in a deck chair, talking to Billika, who squirmed in mingled embarrassment and pleasure. Mario, the last to arise, had just finished breakfast and was stepping out on deck. Gersen tried to match each of them to what he knew of Viole Falushe. Each was tense, yet elegant. Each might have been Possibility No. 2, the murderer in harlequinade who had fled on long legs from Navarth's party.

"Any could be Viole Falushe," said Navarth.

"And what of Zan Zu — Drusilla — whatever her name?"

"She is doomed." Navarth threw his hands up in the air and stalked away.

Gersen looked toward Drusilla, as he had decided to think of her. She stood talking to Hule, the young Druid, who in the fervor of the moment had let fall his cowl. A handsome lad, thought Gersen: earnest, with a look of internal tension which women must eventually find provocative. Indeed Drusilla was examining him with some interest. Druidess Wust barked a sharp order. Hule guiltily snapped up his cowl and slunk away.

Gersen went over to Drusilla. She gave him a look of wary welcome.

"Were you surprised to see us at the hotel?" Gersen asked.

She nodded. "I had never expected to see you again." After a moment's hesitation she asked, "What's going to happen to me? Why am I so important?"

Gersen, still in doubt regarding spy-cells, spoke cautiously: "I don't know what will happen. I will protect you, if I can. You're important because you resemble a girl Viole Falushe once loved and who scorned him. He may be aboard the yacht; he may be one of the passengers. So you must be very careful."

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Drusilla turned a fearful look around the deck. "Which one?"

"You remember the man at Navarth's party?"

"Yes."

"He will be a man like that."

Drusilla winced. "I don't know how to be careful. I wish I were someone else." She looked over her shoulder. "Can't you take me away?"

"Not now."

"Why did it have to be *me*?"

"I might answer if I knew who you were to begin with. Zan Zu? Drusilla Wayles? Jheral Tinzy?"

"I'm none of them," she said in a dolorous voice.

"Who are you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't have a name?"

"The man at the dock saloon called me Spooky. That's not much of a name. I'll be Drusilla Wayles." She looked at him carefully. "You're not really a journalist, are you?"

"I am Henry Lucas, a monomaniac. And I mustn't talk to you too much. You know why."

Drusilla's face lost its momentary animation. "If you say so."

"Try to identify Viole Falushe," said Gersen. "He will want you to love him. If you don't, he'll hide his anger, but you may know by a glance, a threat, a look on his face. Or while he flirts with someone else he will watch to see if you notice."

Drusilla pursed her lips doubtfully. "I'm not very discerning."

"Do your best. but be careful. Don't bring trouble on yourself. Here comes Tanzel."

"Good morning, good morning," said Tanzel breezily. He spoke to Drusilla. "You look as if you've lost your last friend. That's not the case, you know, not with Harry Tanzel aboard! Cheer up! We're off to the Palace of Love!"

Drusilla nodded. "I know."

"Just the place for a pretty girl. I'll personally show you all the sights, if I can fight off my competitors."

Gersen laughed. "No competition here. I can't take time from my job, much as I'd like to."

"Job? At the Palace of Love? Are you an ascetic?"

"Simply a journalist. What I see and hear will show up in *Cosmopolis*."

"Keep my name out of it!" warned Tanzel facetiously. "Someday I'll be a married man; I'd never live down that kind of fame."

"I'll be discreet."

"Good. Come along now." Tanzel took Drusilla's arm. "I'll help you with your morning constitutional. Fifty times around the deck!"

They walked off, Drusilla with a last forlorn glance over her shoulder at Gersen.

Navarth sidled up. "There's

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all were in a mood to drink. Everyone seemed larger than life; the twenty-one were the only people alive in the universe. Toasts were drunk, including several to "our unseen host." The name Viole Falushe was never mentioned.

A troupe of musicians appeared, with fiddles, guitars, pipes. They played wild wailing tunes which set the heart pounding and the head swaying. Zuly leapt to her feet and improvised a dance as wild and abandoned as the music.

Gersen forced himself to sobriety. At times like this it was most important to watch. He saw Lerand Wible whisper to Billika; a moment later she sidled away and off into the shadows, and he too was gone. The Druids and Druidesses were rapt with the dancing, sitting with heads back, eyes half-closed. Only Hule noticed. He looked thoughtfully after the two, then crept quietly up to Drusilla and whispered in her ear.

Drusilla smiled. She turned a flicker of a glance toward Gersen and said something in a soft voice. Hule nodded without enthusiasm and seated himself close beside her. Presently he put his arm around her waist.

A half-hour passed. With only Gersen seeming to notice, Wible and Billika were once more among the group, Billika with eyes bright and mouth soft. It seemed that only a moment later Druidess Laidig bethought herself of Billika and sought around to locate her. There sat Billika. Something was amiss, something was new and different; Druidess Laidig could sense this much, but there was nothing else to see. . . . Her suspicious lulled, she returned to her enjoyment of the music.

Gersen watched Mario, Ethuen, Tanzel. They sat with Tralla and Mornice, but it seemed as if their eyes wandered toward Drusilla. Gersen chewed his lip. Viole Falushe — if indeed he were among the guests — did not seem disposed to yield his identity.

Wine, music, firelight! Gersen leaned back, aware of giddiness. Who among the group was watchful? Who attentive? — that person would be Viole Falushe! Gersen saw no one who seemed other than relaxed. Druid Dakaw was asleep. Druidess Laidig was nowhere to be seen. Skebou Diffiani also had disappeared. Gersen chuckled and leaned toward Navarth to share the joke, then thought better of it.

The fire became embers; the musicians wandered away like figures in a dream. The guests roused themselves and went by swaying walkways to their wicker cabins. If other assignations had been made, if other trysts

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were kept, Gersen had no knowledge of them.

In the morning the guests assembled for breakfast to find that the wagon was gone, and there was speculation as to what mode of transport next would be offered them. After breakfast a steward pointed out a path. "There we will go. I have been requested to guide. If all are ready, I suggest that we set off, for there is far to go before evening."

Hygen Grote spoke in an astonished voice. "You mean to say we *walk?*"

"Exactly this, Lord Grote. There is no other way to our destination."

"I never expected all this backing and filling," complained Grote. "I thought that when we were invited to the Palace of Love, an air-car simply took us there."

"I am only a servant, Lord Grote; I can offer no explanation."

Grote turned away, not completely pleased. But he had no choice. Presently his spirits rose, and he was the first to start singing an old walking song of his fraternity at Lublinken College.

Over low hills, through glades and groves, went the path. They walked over a wide meadow, startling a number of white birds into flight; they descended a valley to a lake, where lunch awaited them.

The steward would not allow an over-long rest. "There is still far to go, and we cannot walk fast for fear of tiring the ladies."

"I'm already tired," snapped the Druidess Wust. "I don't intend to move another step."

"Anyone who wishes may return," said the steward. "The path is plain, and there is a staff to assist you along the way. But now it is time for the rest of us to go on. It is afternoon, and a wind is rising."

Indeed a breeze with a hint of coolness blew small wavelets across the lake, and the western sky was paved with herringbone clouds.

Druidess Wust elected to continue with the group, and all set off along the shore of the lake. Presently the path turned aside, mounted a slope and struck off across a parkland of tall trees and long grass. On and on trudged the party, with the wind at their backs. With the sun declining behind a range of mountains they halted for pastries and tea. Then off once more, with the wind sighing through the branches.

As the sun sank behind the mountains the party entered a dank, heavy woods, which seemed all the darker for the going of the sun.

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The pace was slow. The older women were tired, though only Druidess Wust complained. Druidess Laidig wore a grim expression while Margray Liever strolled along with her customary small smile. Hygen Grote had lapsed into sulky silence, except for an occasional terse word to Doranie.

The woods seemed endless; the wind, now distinctly cool, roared through the upper branches. Dusk fell over the mountains; at last the party stumbled into a clearing to find a rambling old forest lodge of timber and stone. The windows glowed with yellow lights, smoke drifted from a chimney; within must be found warmth and food and good cheer.

And so it was. The tired travelers, climbing stone steps to the porch, entered a vast, beamed parlor, with bright rugs on the floor and a roaring blaze in the fireplace. Some of the group sank gratefully into deep chairs, others chose to go to their rooms to refresh themselves. Once again new clothing was issued: for the men black trousers and short jacket with a dark brown cummerbund; for the ladies long trailing black gowns with white and brown flowers for the hair.

Those who had bathed and dressed returned to the parlor, to the envy of those who still sat tired and dirty. Presently all had bathed and changed into the new dark garments.

Mulled wine and served, and presently a hearty forest dinner: goulash, bread and cheese, red wine; and all the toil of the day was forgotten.

After dinner the guests gathered around the fireplace to sip liquors. Now the talk was loud and brave, everyone speculating as to where lay the Palace of Love. Navarth struck a dramatic pose in front of the fire. "It is plain!" he cried in a great brassy voice. "Or is it not? Does not everyone understand, or is it left to old Navarth, the poet, to illuminate?"

"Speak, Navarth!" called Ethuen. "Reveal to all your insights; why cherish them for your private pleasure?"

"I have never had that intention. All will know what I know; all will feel what I feel. We are midway along the journey! Here is where the carelessness, the amplitude, the clam ease depart. The winds arose at our back and hurried us through the woods. Our refuge is medievalism!"

"Come now, old man," chaffed Tanzel. "Speak so we can understand you."

"Those who understand me will do so; those who cannot will never do so. But all is clear. He knows, he knows!"

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Druidess Laidig, impatient with hyperbole, spoke crossly. "He knows what? Who knows what?"

"What are we all but perambulatory nerves? The artist knows the linkage of nerve with nerve!"

"Speak for yourself," muttered Diffiani.

Navarth performed one of his extravagant gesticulations. "He is a poet like myself! Did I not teach him? Every pang of the soul, every wry ache of the mind, every whisper of blood — "

"Navarth! Navarth!' groaned Wible. "Enough! Or at any rate, something different. Here we are in this strange old lodge, a perfect refuge for ghosts and wipwarks."

Druid Pruitt spoke sententiously, "This is our lore; each man and each woman is a living seed. When his planting time comes, he is delved and covered and finally comes forth as a tree. And each soul is distinct. There are birches and oaks and lavengars and black paneys — "

The talk proceeded. The younger and more energetic folk explored the ancient structure and played hide-and-seek in the long hall, among the billowing amber curtains.

Druidess Laidig became uneasy and craned her neck to find Billika. At last she hoisted herself to her feet and went off, looking here and there, presently to return with a downcast Billika. Druidess Laidig muttered something to the Druidess Wust, who jumped up and went off down the hall. There were loud echoing voices in the hall, then silence. A moment later Wust returned with Hule, who seemed sullen.

Three minutes later Drusilla came back to the saloon. Her face was flushed, her eyes alive with something between mirth and mischief. The dark gown suited her beautifully; she had never looked more beautiful. She crossed the room and slipped into the seat beside Gersen.

"What happened?" he asked.

"We played a game in the hall. I hid with Hule and watched, as you told me, to see who would be most angered."

"And who was?"

"I don't know. Mario says he loves me. Tanzel was laughing, but he was annoyed. Ethuen said nothing and would not look at me."

"What were you doing, that they should be angry? Don't forget it's dangerous to thwart people."

Drusilla's mouth drooped. "Yes. I forgot. I should feel frightened. . . . I *do* feel frightened, when I think about it. But you will take care of me, won't you?"

"I will if I can."

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"You can. I know you can."

"I hope I can. Well, what was going on to annoy Mario, Tanzel and Ethuen?"

"Nothing very much. Hule and I sat on an old couch that was turned backwards. Hule wanted to kiss me, and I let him. The Druidess found us and embarrassed Hule dreadfully. She called me names: 'harlot!' 'Lilith!' 'nymph!'" Drusilla imitated Wust's peculiar grating voice to an exactitude.

"And all heard?"

"Yes. All heard."

"Who seemed the most upset?"

Drusilla shrugged. "Sometimes I think one, then the other. Mario seems the softest. Ethuen has the least humor. Tanzel is sometimes sarcastic."

Obviously, thought Gersen, there had been much which he had missed. "Best that you do not hide with anyone, not even Hule. Be pleasant to each of the three, but prefer none."

Drusilla's face became bleak and drawn. "I am frightened, really. When I was with the three women I thought I might run away. But I feared the poison in their rings. Do you think they would have killed me?"

"I don't know. But for now, go to bed and sleep. And open your door to no one."

Drusilla rose to her feet. With a final cryptic glance at Gersen she went to the stairs, ascended to the balcony and entered her chamber.

One by one the group dwindled, and at last Gersen sat alone gazing into the dying fire, waiting for he knew not what. The balcony lights were dim; a balustrade obscured his vision. A shape drifted up to the door of one of the chambers, which quickly opened and closed.

Gersen waited another hour, while the fire became embers and the wind blew spatters of rain against the dark windows. There was no further activity. Gersen went to his own bed.

XXII

The chamber which had received the visitor, so Gersen noted the next morning, was that of Tralla Callob, the sociology student. He watched to see upon whom her eyes rested, but could be sure of nothing.

This morning all wore similar costumes: gray suede trousers, a black blouse, a brown jacket, an intricate black hat which was almost a helmet, with ear-flaps flaring rakishly outward.

Breakfast, like the meal of the night before, was simple and substantial. As they ate the pilgrims cast appraising glances at the sky. Ragged patches of mist blew over the mountain; directly overhead

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was a thin overcast, breaking at the east into tattered clots of nimbus, an outlook not too cheerful.

After breakfast the steward marshaled the pilgrims, evading questions put to him.

"How far must we walk today?" — this from Hygen Grote.

"I really don't know, sir. I have never heard the distance mentioned. But the sooner we start, the sooner we arrive."

Hygen Grote gave a despondent snort. "This certainly wasn't what I expected. Well, I'm as ready as I'll ever be."

The path led south from the clearing; all turned to take a final look at the somber old lodge before it passed from sight.

For several hours the trail wound through the woods. The sky remained overcast; the gray-mauve light which penetrated the trees invested the moss, the ferns, the occasional pale flowers, with a peculiarly rich color. Rocky outcrops began to be seen, with black and red lichen; everywhere were fragile little growths not dissimilar to the fungus of Earth, but taller and many-tiered, exhaling a bitter, old ale smell when crushed.

The path began to rise, the woods fell below. The pilgrims found themselves on a rock-strewn slope, with mountains looming to the west. At a stream they paused to drink and catch their breath, and the steward distributed sweet biscuits.

To the east spread the forest, gloomy and dark; above loomed the mountain. Hygen Grote again deprecated the difficulty of the way, to which the guide made the blandest of replies: "There is much in what you say, Lord Grote. But as you know, I am only a servant, with orders to make the journey as convenient and interesting as possible."

"How can trudging these weary miles be interesting or convenient?" grumbled Grote, to be answered by Margray Liever:

"Come now, Hygen. The scenery is delightful. Look at the view. And did you not enjoy the romantic old lodge? I did."

"I am sure that this is the hope of the Margrave," said the steward. "And now, Lords and Ladies, best that we continue."

The trail slanted up the mountain slope; soon Druidess Laidig and Doranie were falling behind, and the steward courteously slowed the pace. The path entered a stony gulch, and the ascent became less steep.

Lunch was brief and austere, consisting of soup, biscuits and sausage. Then once again the pilgrims set off along the trail. Wind began to strike down the mountainside, a few cold gusts

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at a time; overhead, dark gray clouds raced to the east. Up the bleak mountainside plodded the pilgrims; and the city of Kouhila, the glass-hulled yacht, the green and gold wagon were only remote memories. Margray Liever remained cheerful, and Navarth swung along grinning as if at some malicious joke. Hygen Grote gave up complaining, saving his breath for the exertion of moving up-hill.

Halfway through the afternoon a rain squall drove the party to shelter under a jut of rock. The sky was dark; an unreal gray light washed the landscape. The pilgrims in their costumes of black and umber were as if derived from the same stone and soil as the mountain itself.

The trail entered a stony gorge. The pilgrims plodded forward in silence, the badinage and gentilities of the first few days put aside. There was another brief shower which the steward ignored, for the light was waning. The gorge widened, but the way ahead was blocked by a massive stone wall, topped by a row of iron spikes. The steward went to a black iron postern, raised a knocker, let it fall. After a long minute, the portal creaked back, to reveal a crooked old man in black garments.

The steward addressed the pilgrims. "Here is where I leave you. The path lies beyond; you need only follow. Make the best haste possible, because darkness is not far away."

One by one the group passed through the gap; the portal clanged shut behind them. For a moment they milled uncertainly, looking this way and that. The steward and the old man had gone; there was none to direct them.

Diffiani pointed: "There, the path. It leads up toward the height."

Painfully the pilgrims proceeded. The path traversed a stony barren, crossed a river, once more slanted up through the blowing wind. Finally, just as the light failed, the path came out on the ridge. Diffiani, in the lead, pointed ahead. "Lights. A hospice of some sort."

The group straggled forward, bending to the wind-gusts, turning faces away from driven drops of rain. A long, low stone structure bulked against the sky; one or two of the windows showed a wan yellow illumination. Diffiani found a door, pounded on it with his fist.

It creaked open, and a woman peered forth. "Who are you? Why do you come so late?"

"We are travelers, guests for the Palace of Love," bawled Hygen Grote. "Is this the way?"

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THE PALACE OF LOVE

"Yes, this is the way. Enter then. Were you expected?"

"Of course we were expected! Is there lodging for us here?"

"Yes, yes," quavered the old woman. "I can give you beds, but this is the old castle. You should have gone by the other path. Enter then. I must look about. You have supped, I trust?"

"No," said Grote despondently, "we have not."

"Perhaps I can find gruel. What a shame the castle is so cold!"

The pilgrims passed into a bleak courtyard, lit by a pair of feeble lamps. The old woman conducted them one at a time to tall-ceilinged chambers in various quarters of the castle. These were austere, gloomy, decorated to the precepts of some long-forgotten tradition. Gersen's chamber contained a cot, a single lamp of red and blue glass. Three walls were black iron, relieved by patterns of rust. In one of the walls was a door. The fourth wall was paneled in dark, waxed wood and carved with enormous, grotesque masks. There was neither fire nor heating; the room was chill.

The old lady, breathless and anxious, told Gersen, "When food is ready you'll be summoned." She pointed to the door. "Yonder is the bath, with precious little warm water. One must make do." And she hurried away. Ger-

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sen went into the bathroom, tested the shower; the water ran hot. He stripped off his clothes, bathed, then, rather than dressing in sodden clothes, he stretched out on the cot and covered himself with a quilt. Time passed; Gersen heard a distant gong strike nine times. There might be supper; then again, there might not. Gersen turned over and went back to sleep.

Twelve strokes of the gong. Into the room came a slender maiden with silky blonde hair. She wore a skin-tight garment of blue velvet, blue leather slippers with rolled toes.

Gersen sat up in bed. The maiden spoke, "We have now prepared a meal. All are aroused; all are summoned to eat." She rolled a wardrobe cart into the room. "Here are garments; do you require assistance?" Without waiting for response she brought under-linen to Gersen. Presently he was clothed in beautiful fabric after a style quaint, ornate and complicated. The maiden dressed his hair, applied gallantry-disks to his cheeks, sprayed him with scent. "My Lord is magnificent," she murmured. "And now: a mask, which tonight is of necessity."

The mask consisted of a black velvet casque fitting down to the ears, with a black visor, a nose-cup, a chin-guard. Only Gersen's cheeks, mouth and eyes were bare.

"My Lord is now mysterious as well," said the maiden in the softest of voices. "I will lead you, for the way is by the old corridors."

She took him down a draughty staircase, along a dank, echoing corridor, with only the feeblest of lamps to light the way. The walls, once splendid in patterns of magenta, silver and gold, were faded and blotched; the tiles of the floor were loose.

The maiden halted by a heavy red portiere. She looked sidelong at Gersen and put her finger to her lips. With the dim light glowing on her blue velvet garment, glinting in her hair, she seemed dream-stuff, a creature too exquisite to be real. "Lord," she said, "within is our banquet. I must urge you to mystery, for this is the game all must play and you may not speak your name."

She pulled aside the portiere; Gersen stepped through, into a vast hall. From a ceiling so high as to be unseen hung a single chandelier, casting an island of light around a great table laid with linen, silver and crystal.

Here sat a dozen people in the most elaborate of costumes, wearing masks. Gersen examined them, but recognized none. Were

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they his fellows along the journey? He could not be sure. Others entered the room. Now they came by twos and threes, all masked, all moving with an air of wonder.

Gersen recognized Navarth, whose swaggering gait was unmistakable. The girl, was she Drusilla? He could not be certain.

Forty people had entered the room, converging slowly upon the table. Footmen in silver and blue livery assisted all to seats; poured wine in the goblets, served from silver trays.

Gersen ate and drank, aware of a peculiar confusion, almost bewilderment. Where and what was reality? The rigors of the journey seemed as remote as childhood. Gersen drank somewhat more wine than he might have done under different circumstances.

The chandelier exploded in a dazzling burst of green light, then went out. Gersen's eyes projected orange after-images into the dark; from around the table came whispers and hisses of surprise.

The chandelier slowly returned to normal. A tall man stood on a chair. He wore black garments and a black mask; he held a goblet of wine in his hand.

"Guests," he said, "I make you welcome. I am Viole Falushe. You have attained the Palace of Love."

XXIII

"There are many varieties of love," said Viole Falushe in a pleasant, husky voice. "The range is wide, and all have contributed to the creation of the Palace. Not all of my guests discover this, and not every phase is yielded to them. For some the Palace will seem little more than a holiday resort. Others will be haunted by what has been described as unnatural beauty! This is everywhere: in every detail, every view. Others will revel in ardor, and here I must offer information."

Gersen studied Viole Falushe with a rapt intensity. The tall masked figure stood spare, straight, arms at sides. Gersen turned his head this way and that, trying to identify the figure, but the chandelier hanging directly above the man distorted his contours.

"The people at the Palace of Love are amiable, gay and beautiful and fall into two categories," said Viole Falushe. "The first are servants. They are pleased to obey every wish of my guests, every whim or caprice. The second class, the happy people who inhabit the Palace, are as independent in their friendships as I myself. They are to be identified by their garments, which are white. Your choice is wide."

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Gersen sought around the table, trying to find Tanzel, or Mario or Ethuen and thus eliminate them from suspicion. In this effort he was unsuccessful. Among the forty were a dozen persons who might be any of the three. He turned back to listen to Viole Falushe.

"Are there restrictions? A person who went mad and began to kill would naturally be restrained. Then again, all of us here cherish our privacy, one of our most delightful prerogatives. Only the most thoughtless person would intrude where he was not wanted. My personal apartments are sufficiently secluded; you need not apprehend an accidental intrusion; this is almost impossible." Viole Falushe turned his head slowly, looked around the room. No one spoke; the room was heavy with expectancy.

Viole Falushe spoke on. "So now: the Palace of Love! At times in the past I have arranged small dramas of which the participants were never aware. I have contrived moods in artful sequence. I have employed tragic contrasts to heighten the delectation. On this occasion there will be no such program. You will be free to do as you like, to create your own dramas. I advise restraint. The rare jewels are the most precious. The degree of austerity I myself practice would astound you. My great pleasure is creation; of this I never tire. Some of my guests have complained of a gentle melancholy which hangs in the air. I agree that the mood exists. The explanation, I believe, arises from the fugacity of beauty, the tragic pavanne to which all of us step. Ignore this mood; why brood, when there is so much love and beauty here? Take what is offered; have no regrets; a thousand years from now it will be all the same. Satiety is a problem, but it is your own. I cannot protect you. The servants are to serve; command them. The residents who wear white are to woo, to beguile. I pray that you do not become infatuated either with the Palace or its people; such a situation presents difficulties. You will not see me, though spiritually I am always in your midst. There are no spy devices, no sound transmitters, no vision cells. Upbraid me if you choose, revile me, praise me — I cannot hear. My only reward is the act of creation and the effect it produces. Do you wish to look forth on the Palace of Love? Turn then in your seats!"

The far wall slid away; daylight poured into the hall; before the guests spread a landscape of mind-wrenching beauty: wide lawns, feathery green bower-trees, tall black cypress, twink-

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ling birch; ponds, pools, marble urns; pavilions, terraces, rotundas, constructed to an airy, delicate architecture that seemed almost to float.

Gersen, like the others, had been startled by the sudden opening of the wall. Recovering, he jumped to his feet, but the man in black had disappeared.

Gersen sought out Navarth. "Who was it? Mario? Tanzel? Ethuen?"

Navarth shook his head. "I did not notice. I have been looking for the girl. Where is she?"

With a sudden sinking feeling Gersen swung around. None of the people in the room was Drusilla. "When did you see her last?"

"When we arrived, when we came into the countryyard."

Already the journey seemed remote. Gersen muttered: "I hoped to protect her. I told her so. She trusted me."

Navarth made an impatient motion. "You could have done nothing."

Gersen went to the window, looked across the panorama. To the left was the sea, a group of distant islands. To the right mountains reared ever higher and harsher, with cliffs falling to the valley floor. Below was the Palace: a loose grouping of terraces, halls and pleasaunces. A door slid aside to reveal a descending staircase. One by one the guests descended to the valley.

The precincts of the Palace occupied a roughly hexagonal area perhaps a mile on a side. The base was the north cliff, with the Palace at its midpoint. The second side, clockwise, was demarcated by a line of rocky crags, the gaps between which were choked by rank, thorny thickets. The third side was white beach and warm blue sea. The fourth and fifth sides were less distinct and merged into the natural landscape. The sixth side, angling back to the cliff, was demarcated by a line of carefully cultivated flower beds and fruit trees arranged against a rude stone wall. Within the area were three villages, innumerable glades, gardens, waterways. The guests wandered where they chose, spent the long days in whatever fashion seemed most pleasurable. Bright mornings, golden afternoons, evenings and nights: one by one they drifted away.

The servants, as Viole Falushe had implied, were acquiescent and possessed of great physical charm. The folk in white, even more beautiful than the underservants, were innocent and willful as children. Some were cordial, some were perverse and impudent, all were unpredictable. It seemed as if their sole ambition

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was to evoke love, to tantalize, to fill the mind with longing, and they became depressed only when guests found the under-servants preferable to themselves. They showed no awareness of the worlds of the universe and only small curiosity, though their minds were active and their moods mercurial. They thought only of love and the various aspects of fulfillment.

As Viole Falushe had hinted, infatuation too intense might lead to tragedy. Of this danger the people in white were gravely aware, but made small effort to avoid the danger.

The mystery of the Druids' presence resolved itself. On the first day after arrival Dakaw, Pruitt, Laidig and Wust, with Hule and Billika in careful convoy, explored the precincts and fixed upon a delightful little glade for their center of operations. To the back rose a line of black cypress, to right and left were lower trees and flowering shrubs, at the center was a great spaddle-rooted oak. In front of the glade a pair of shelters was erected, low domes of pale brown fiber. Here the group took up residence, and thereafter each morning and afternoon held evangelical meetings, expounding the nature of their religion to all who came past. With great fervor they urged rigor, harshness, restraint and ritual upon the folk of the garden, who listened politely enough, but after the meetings enticed the Druids to relaxation and pleasure. Gersen decided that the whole affair was one of Viole Falushe's wry jokes: a game he had chosen to play with the Druids. The other guests arrived at the same conclusion and attended the meetings to judge whose doctrines would triumph.

The Druids worked with great intensity and built a fane of stones and twigs. Standing at the front, one or the other would cry out: "Must you all then die to become dead? The mode to the Eternal is through minglement with a Vitality more enduring than your own. The source of all is the Triad Mag-Rag-Dag: Air, Earth and Water. This is the Holy Immanence, which combines to produce the Tree of Life! The Tree is the wise, the vital, the enduring! Look at lesser things: inserts, flowers, fish, man! See how they grow, bloom, lapse, while the Tree in it placid wisdom lives on! Yea, you titillate your flesh, you gorge your stomach, you flood your brain with vapor. What then? How soon you die, while the noble Tree, with roots in Earth, holds innumberable leaves to the glory of the sky! Forever! And when your flesh sags and withers, when your

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nerves no longer leap, when your belly is sour, when your nose drips from the liquor you have misused — then is no time to worship the Tree! No, no, no! For the Tree will have none of your corruption. All must be fresh and good. So worship! Give over the sterile cavortings, the animal gratifications! Worship the Tree!"

The Palace folk listened with respect and awe. It was impossible to judge how deeply the Druid doctrine touched them. Meanwhile Dakaw and Pruitt began to dig a great hole under the oak, burrowing down between the sprawled roots. Hule and Billika were not allowed to dig and showed no disposition to do so. Indeed they watched the process with horrified fascination.

The Palace folk, in their turn, insisted that the Druids participate in their festivities, arguing: "You wish us to learn your ways, but in all fairness you must know the way we live too, so that you may judge our lives and see if after all we are corrupt!" Grudgingly the Druids acquiesced, sitting in a huddled group and maintaining the closest possible strictures upon Hule and Billika.

The other guests watched with varied reactions. Skebou Diffiani attended the meetings with regularity and presently, to the astonishment of all, announced his intent to become a Druid. Thereafter he donned black robe and cowl and joined the others at their rituals. Torrace daNossa spoke of the Druids with pitying contempt; Lerand Wible, who along the way had displayed an interest in Billika, threw up his arms in disgust and stayed away; Mario, Ethuen and Tanzel went their own ways and were seen but seldom.

Navarth had become obsessed. He roved the garden, morose, dissatisfied, looking this way and that. He took no joy in the beauty of the garden and went so far as to sneer at Viole Falushe's arrangements. "There is no novelty here; the pleasures are banal. There are no exhilarations, no staggering insights, no sublime sweep of mind. All is either gross or maudlin: the gratification of gut and gland."

"This may be true," Gersen admitted. "The pleasures of the place are simple and undramatic. But what is wrong with this?"

"Nothing. But it is not poetry."

"It is all very beautiful. To do Viole Falushe credit, he has avoided the macabre, the sadistic spectacles, which occur elsewhere, and he allows his servants a certain degree of integrity."

Navarth made a sour grumbling sound. "You are an innocent. The more exotic pleasures he reserves for himself. Who

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knows what goes on beyond the walls? He is a man to halt at nothing. And 'integrity' in these people? Bathos! They are dolls, toys, confections! No doubt many are the little children extorted from Kouhila, those he did not sell to the Mahrab. And when they lose their youth, what then? Where do they go?"

Gersen only shook his head. "I don't know."

"And where is Jheral Tinzy?" Navarth went on. "Where is the girl? What does he do with her? He has had her at his mercy."

Gersen gave a grim nod. "I know."

"You know," jeered Navarth, "but only after I reminded you. You are not only innocent; you are futile and foolish, no less than myself. She trusted you to protect her, and what have you done? Swilled and trolloped with the others, and this is the extent of your effort."

Gersen thought the outburst exaggerated but made a mild reply. "If I could contrive some feasible course of action, I would do so."

"And in the meantime?"

"In the meantime I am learning."

"Learning what?"

"I find that none of the people here know Viole Falushe by sight. His offices seem to be somewhere back in the mountains; I can find them nowhere in the valley. I dare not try to cross the stone wall to the west, nor the thorn barrier to the east. I would certainly be apprehended and, journalist or not, dealt with harshly. Since I have no weapons I can demand nothing. I must be patient. If I do not speak to him here at the Palace of Love, I will no doubt find opportunity elsewhere.

"All for your magazine, eh?"

"Why else?" asked Gersen.

They had come to the glade of the Druids. Dakaw and Pruitt were delving as usual below the great oak, there they had excavated a chamber tall enough for a man to stand erect.

Navarth approached, peered down into the sweating dust-streaked faces. "What do you do down there, you burrowing Druids? Are you not pleased with the vista above ground that you seek a new viewpoint below?"

"You are facetious," said Pruitt coldly. "Be on your way. This is holy soil."

"How can you be so sure? It looks like ordinary dirt."

Neither Pruitt nor Dakaw made response.

Navarth barked down, "What sort of mischief are you up to? This is no ordinary pastime."

"Go away, old poet," said Pruitt. "Your breath is a pollution and saddens the Tree."

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Navarth moved back and watched the digging from a little distance. "I do not like holes in the ground," he told Gersen. "They are unpleasant. Look at Wible yonder. He stands as if he were overseer to the project!" Navarth pointed toward the entrance to the glade, where Wible stood, legs apart, hands clasped behind his back, whistling between his teeth. Navarth joined him. "The work of the Druids enthralls you?"

"Not at all," said Lerand Wible. "They dig a grave."

"As I suspected. For whom?"

"That I can't be sure. Perhaps you. Perhaps me."

"I doubt if they will inter me," said Navarth. "You may be more pliable."

"I doubt if they will enter anyone," said Wible, whistling once more through his teeth.

"Indeed? How can you be so sure?"

"Come to the 'consecration' and see for yourself."

"When does this rite occur?"

"Tomorrow night, so I have been informed."

XXIV

Little music was to be heard on the grounds of his Palace; the quiet of the garden was as crystalline and clear as a dewdrop. But on the following morning the folk in white brought forth stringed instruments and for an hour played a wistful music rich with plangent overtones. A sudden shower sent all hurrying to the shelter of a nearby rotunda, where they stood chattering like birds, peering up at the sky.

Gersen, contemplating their faces, thought how frail was the connection between them and the guests. Did they know anything except frivolity and love? And there was the question raised by Navarth. What happened when they aged? Few in the garden were past the first bloom of their maturity.

The sun came forth. The garden glinted with freshness. Gersen, drawn by curiosity, went to the Druids' glade. Within one of the shelters he glimpsed Billika's pale face. Then Wust came to stare at him from the doorway.

The long afternoon passed. Today a portent hung in the air, and uneasiness seemed to infect everyone. Evening arrived. The sun sank in a great tumult of clouds; gold, orange and red flamed overhead and far into the east. With the coming of dusk, folk of the garden went to the Druids' glade. To each side of the oak tree were fires, tended by Druidess Laidig and Druidess Wust.

Druid Pruitt emerged from his

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shelter. He went to the fane and began his address. His voice was heavy and resonant; he paused frequently, as if to hear the echoes of his words.

Lerand Wible approached Gersen. "I am speaking to everyone in our group. Whatever happens, do not interfere. Do you agree to this?"

"Naturally not."

"I didn't think you would. Well then — "

Wible whispered a few words; Gersen grunted. Wible moved off to speak to Navarth, who tonight was carrying a staff. After Wible spoke, Navarth threw down his staff.

" — on each world a hallowed Tree! How does it become so? By the afflatus, by the concentration of Life. Oh, worshipful Druids, who share the life of the First Germ, bring forth your awe, your most poignant dedication! What say we? Two are here, two have lived for this consecration. Come forth, Druids, go to the Tree!" From one shelter staggered Hule, from the other Billika. Baffled, dull-eyed as if bewildered or drugged, they stared this way and that, then saw the fires. Fascinated they approached, step by slow step. Silence was heavy in the glade. The two approached the tree, looked at the fires, then descended into the hole below the tree.

"Behold!" called Pruitt. "They enter the life of the Tree — oh, blessed pair! — which now becomes the Soul of the World. Exalted children, lucky two! Forever and ever stand in sun, in rain, by day, by night; help us to truth!" Druids Dakaw, Pruitt and Diffiani began to spade earth into the hole. They worked with gusto. In half an hour the hole was full, the soil banked around the roots. The Druids marched around the tree, holding brands from the fire. Each called forth an invocation, and the ceremony ended with a chant.

The Druids customarily breakfasted at the refectory of the near village. The morning after the consecration they matched across the meadows, entered the refectory. Behind them came Hule and Billika. The Druids took their usual places, as did Hule and Billika.

Wust was the first to notice. She pointed a trembling finger. Laidig screamed. Pruitt leapt away, then turned and ran from the refectory. Dakaw fell back like a half-filled sack; Skebou Diffiani, sitting bolt upright, stared in puzzlement. Hule and Billika ignored the consternation they had caused.

Laidig, sobbing and gasping, reeled from the room, followed by Wust. Diffiani was the least

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disturbed. He spoke to Hule. "How did you get out?"

"By a tunnel," said Hule. "Wible caused a tunnel to be dug."

Wible came forward. "The servants are here to be used. I used them. We dug a tunnel."

Diffiani nodded slowly. He reached up, took off his cowl, inspected it, tossed it into a corner.

Dakaw, roaring, rose to his feet. He struck once at Hule, knocking him to the floor, then aimed a tremendous blow at Wible, who stepped back, grinning. "Go back to your tree, Dakaw. Dig another hole and bury yourself."

Dakaw marched from the inn.

Wust and Laidig were finally discovered, crouching in a bower. Pruitt had run south, beyond the precincts of the garden, and was seen no more.

In some fashion the episode with the Druids had broken a web. The guests, looking at each other, knew that the end of their visit was approaching, that soon they would be departing the Palace of Love.

Gersen stood looking up at the mountains. Patience was well and good, but he might never be so close to Viole Falushe again.

He pondered the small clues he had gleaned. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the banquet hall communicated with Viole Falushe's apartments. Gersen went to examine the portal at the foot of the stairs. It showed a blank, featureless face. The mountain-side above was unclimbable.

To the east, where crags reared over the sea, Viole Falushe had set a thorn palisade. To the west the way was barred by a stone wall. Gersen turned to look south. If he made a long journey, circling the periphery of the garden, he would then be able to climb into the mountains, to approach the area from above.

This was the sort of purposeless activity Gersen detested. He would be moving without knowledge, without plan. There must be some better method . . . . He could think of none.

Very well, then: activity. He looked at the sun. Six hours of daylight remained. He must go far afield and trust to luck. If he were apprehended, he was Henry Lucas, journalist, in search of information — a statement of sufficient force unless Viole Falushe undertook to use a truth-extracting device. Gersen's flesh crawled. The sensation annoyed him. He had become soft, diffident, over-wary.

Reproaching himself first for cowardice, then for wilful recklessness, he set forth, walking south and heading away from the mountains.

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XXV

The garden ended at a grove of indigenous trees, of a type Gersen had not seen before: tall, gaunt organisms with pulpy black leaves, from which dripped a musty unpleasant sap.

Fearing poison, Gersen breathed as shallowly as possible. He was relieved to reach open ground with no other sensation than dizziness. To the east, toward the ocean, were orchards and cultivated soil; to the west a dozen long sheds were visible. Barns? Warehouses? Dormitories? Keeping to the shadow of the trees Gersen walked west and presently came upon a road leading from the sheds toward the mountains.

No living creature was in sight. The sheds seemed deserted. Gersen decided not to explore them; they certainly were not the headquarters of Viole Falushe.

Across the road was a wild area overgrown with thorny scrub. Gersen looked dubiously down the road. Best to travel by the barrens; there would be less chance of discovery. He ducked across the road, struck off toward the mountains. The afternoon sun shone bright. The scrub was host to swarms of small red mites which set up an impatient whirring sound when disturbed. Stepping around a hummock — a hive or nest of some sort — Gersen came upon a bloated serpent-like creature with a face uncannily human. The creature saw Gersen with an expression of comical alarm, then, rearing back, displayed a proboscis from which it evidently intended to eject a fluid. Gersen beat a quick retreat and thereafter walked more warily.

The road veered west, away from the garden. Gersen crossed once more and took shelter under a cluster of yellow bladder-plants. He considered the mountain, tracing a route which would bring him to the ridge. Unfortunately, while climbing, he would be exposed to the gaze of anyone who happened by.

No help for it. He took a last look around and, seeing nothing to dissuade him, set forth.

The mountainside was steep, at times precipitious. Gersen made discouragingly slow progress. The sun swung across the sky. Below spread the Palace of Love and the garden. Gersen's chest pounded, and his throat felt numb, as if it had been anesthetized. The influence of the noxious black-leaved forest? Ever higher, the panorama ever wider.

For a space the way became easier, and Gersen angled toward the east, where presumably Viole Falushe maintained his headquarters. Motion. Gersen stopped

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short. From the corner of his eye he had seen — what? He could not be sure. The flicker had come from below and to his right. He scrutinized the face of the mountain and presently saw what otherwise might have evaded his attention: a deep cleft or fissure with a bridge between two arched apertures, the whole camouflaged by a stone wall.

Clutching and straining, Gersen angled down toward the cleft, finally reaching a point thirty feet above the walkway. There was no means to descend. He could go neither forward nor up nor down. His fingers were tiring, his legs were cramped.

Thirty feet: too far to jump. He would break his legs. Out upon the bridge came a pale, stoop-shouldered man with a large, moist head, a clipped shock of black-gray hair. He wore a white jacket, black trousers. It was the white jacket, Gersen now realized, which had originally drawn his attention. If the man should look up, if a dislodged pebble should strike the bridge, Gersen was lost.

The man moved into the opposite aperture and out of sight. Gersen gave a fantastic gravity-defying leap, to throw himself into the angle of the cleft. He thrust out his legs, doubled his knees, pressing between the walls. Inch by inch he let himself down, gratefully jumping the final six feet. He stretched, massaged sore muscles, then limped over to the western doorway, into which the man had disappeared.

A white-tiled hall led back fifty yards, broken by areas of glass and occasional doorways. Beside one of these glass areas stood the stoop-shouldered man, peering at something which had attracted his attention. He raised his hand, signaled. From somewhere beyond Gersen's range of vision came a heavy-shouldered man with a thick neck, narrow head, a coarse yellow brush of hair, white eyes. The two looked through the glass, and the white-eyed man seemed to be amused.

Gersen drew back. Crossing the walkway, he looked up the passage to the east, to see a single doorway at the far end. The walls and floor were white tile; ornate lamps scattered rays and planes of various colors.

With long stealthy strides Gersen went to the far door and touched the open-button. No response. He sought for code points, or a lock-hole, without success. The opening mechanism was controlled from the other side. In one sense, this was encouraging. The stoop-shouldered man had come this way, and it could only be to confer with whomever sat or stood beyond the door.

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It would not do to attract attention. Yet Gersen must do something and quickly. At any moment one of the two men might approach, and he had nowhere to hide. He scrutinized the door with great care. The latch was magnetic; retraction was accomplished by an electro-muscle. The escutcheon plate was fixed to the panel with adhesive. Gersen searched his pockets, but found nothing of utility. Loping back down the hall, he reached up to the first lighting fixture, twisted loose a decorative metal cusp with a sharp point. Returning to the door he pried at the escutcheon plate and presently snapped it free to reveal the mechanism of the open-button. The action was controlled from somewhere beyond the door. Gersen traced the circuit, and with the point of his metal cusp shorted across the relay contacts. He touched the button. The door slid aside, silent as a whisper.

Gersen passed through the opening into and unoccupied foyer. He replaced the escutcheon plate and let the door slide shut.

There was much to see. The far end of the room was ripple glass. To the left an archway opened upon a flight of stairs. To the right were five cinematic panels, each displaying Jheral Tinzy in various guises at different stages of existence. Or were they five different girls? One, wearing a short black skirt, was Drusilla Wayles; Gersen recognized the expression of her face, the droop to her mouth, the restless habit of tossing her head to the side. Another, a delightful imp in clown's regalia, cavorted on a stage. A Jheral Tinzy of thirteen or fourteen in the translucent white gown of a sleepwalker moved slowly across an eerie setting of stone, black shadow, sand. A fourth Jheral Tinzy, a year or two younger than Drusilla, wore only a barbaric skirt of leather and bronze. She stood on a stone-flagged terrace and seemed to be performing a religious ritual. A fifth Jheral Tinzy, a year or two older than Drusilla, walked briskly along a city street.

Gersen glimpsed all this in the space of two seconds. The effect was fascinating, but he could not spare time to look. For beyond the ripple glass wall was the distorted image of a tall, spare man.

Gersen crossed the foyer on four silken strides. His hand went to the open-button of the door; he tensed, touched the button. The door failed to open. Gersen exhaled a long slow sigh of frustration.

The man turned his head sharply; all Gersen could see was distortion and blur. "Retz? Back once more?" He jerked his head

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suddenly forward; the glass was evidently permeable to his vision.

"It's Henry Lucas, the journalist!" His voice took on a harsh edge. "There is a need for much explanation. What are you doing here?

"The answer is obvious," said Gersen. "I came here to interview you. There seemed no other way."

"How did you find my office?"

"I climbed the mountain, jumped down where the walkway crosses the notch. Then I came along the passageway."

"Indeed, indeed. Are you a human fly to traverse the cliff?"

"It was not so difficult," said Gersen. "There would be no other opportunity."

"This is a serious annoyance," said Viole Falushe. "Do you recall my comments on the subject of privacy? I am rigid on this score."

"Your comments were addressed to your guests," said Gersen. "I am here as a man with a job to do."

"Your occupation gives you no license to break laws," Viole Falushe stated in a gentle voice. "You are aware of my wishes, which here; as elsewhere in the cluster, are law. I find your trespass not only insolent but inexcusable. In fact, it goes far beyond the brashness ordinarily tolerated in a journalist. It almost seems — "

Gersen interrupted. "Please do not let your imagination dominate your sense of proportion. I am interested in the photographs in the foyer. They seem to be the likeness of the young lady who accompanied us on our journey, Navarth's ward."

"This is the case," said Viole Falushe. "I have a strong interest in the young woman. I entrusted her upbringing to Navarth with unhapy results; she is a wanton."

"Where is she now? I have not seen her since we arrived at the Palace."

"She's enjoying her visit in circumstances somewhat different from yours," said Viole Falushe. "But why your interest? She is nothing to you."

"Except that I befriended her and tried to clarify certain issues which she found confusing."

"And these issues were?"

"You will allow me to use candor?"

"Why not? You can hardly provoke me more than you already have."

"The girl was fearful of what might happen to her. She wanted to live a normal life, but did not care to risk retaliation for actions she could not avoid."

Viole Falushe's voice trembled. "Is this how she spoke of me? Only in terms of fear and 'retaliation?' "

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"She had no reason to speak otherwise."

"You are a bold man, Mr. Lucas. Surely you know my reputation. I subscribe to a doctrine of general equity: that he who commits a grievance must repair the effects of this act."

"What of Jheral Tinzy?" Gersen inquired, hoping to divert Viole Falushe.

"'Jheral Tinzy'." Viole Falushe breathed the name. "Dear Jheral: as wilful and promiscuous as the unfortunate girl whom you befriended. Jheral could never quite repay the damage she wrought upon me. Oh, those wasted years!" Viole Falushe's voice quavered; grief lay near the surface. "Never could she requite her wrongs, though she did her best."

"She is alive?"

"No." Viole Falushe's mood changed once more. "Why do you ask?"

"I am a journalist. You know why I am here. I want a photograph of Jheral Tinzy for our article."

"This is a matter I do not care to publicize."

"I am puzzled by the resemblance between Jheral Tinzy and the girl Drusilla. Can you explain this?"

"I could," said Viole Falushe. "But I do not choose to do so. And there still remains your intrusion, which has shocked me, to such an extent that I demand retribution." And Viole Falushe leaned negligently back against an article of furniture.

Gersen reflected a moment. Flight was futile. Attack was impossible. Viole Falushe certainly carried a weapon; Gersen had none. Galling though the situation might be, he must persuade Viole Falushe to change his mind. He tried a reasonable approach. "Conceivably I violated the letter of your regulations, but what avail is an article on the Palace of Love without the comments of its creator? There is no communicating with you, since you choose to keep yourself aloof from your guests."

Viole Falushe seemed surprised. "Navarth knows my call-code well. A servant would have brought you a telephone unit; you might have called me at any time."

"This did not occur to me," said Gersen thoughtfully. "No, I had not considered the telephone. You say Navarth knows the code?"

"Certainly. It is the same as that which I use on Earth."

"The fact remains," said Gersen, "I am here. You have seen Part I of the projected article; Parts II and II are even more highly colored. If we want to present your point of view, it is im-

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portant that we speak together. So open the door and we will discuss the matter."

"No," said Viole Falushe. "It is my whim to remain anonymous, since I enjoy mingling with my guests . . . . Well, then," he grumbled, "I suppose I must swallow my outrage. It is not just that you should evade your debt to me. Perhaps you will not in any event. For the moment, you may regard yourself as reprieved." He spoke a soft word that Gersen did not hear; a door opened in the foyer. "Go within; this is my library. I will speak with you there."

XXVI

Gersen passed into a long room carpeted in dark green. A heavy table at the center supported a pair of antique lamps, a selection of current periodicals. One wall was lined with ancient books, the shelves sliding up or down through floor and ceiling to magazines above and below. There was a standard microreference system and a number of soft chairs.

Gersen looked around with a trace of envy; the atmosphere was quiet, civilized, rational, remote from the hedonistic life of the Palace. A screen glowed to reveal Viole Falushe sprawling in a chair. A light threw his form into silhouette; he was no more identifiable now than before.

"Very well then," said Viole Falushe. "So here we are. You have been making your photographic records, I believe?"

"I have several hundred pictures. More than necessary to cover those superficial aspects of the Palace which you display to your guests."

Viole Falushe seemed amused. "And you are curious as to what else occurs?"

"From a journalistic standpoint."

"Hm. What do you think of the Palace then?"

"It is remarkably pleasant."

"You have a reservation?"

"Something is lacking. Perhaps the flaws lies in your servants. They lack depth, they do not seem real."

"I recognize this," said Viole Falushe. "They have no traditions. The only remedy is time."

"They are also without responsibility. After all, they are slaves?"

"Not quite, for they do not realize it. They consider themselves the Fortunate Folk, and such they are. It is precisely this unreality, this sense of faerie, that I have been at pains to develop."

"And when they age, what then? What becomes of the Fortunate Folk?"

"Some work the farms sur-

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rounding the garden. Some are sent elsewhere."

"To the real world? They are sold as slaves?"

"All of us are slaves, in some wise."

"How are you a slave?"

"I am vicitim to a terrible obsession. I was a sensitive boy cruelly thwarted; I daresay Navarth has provided the details. Rather than submit, I was forced by my sense of justice to seek compensation — which I am still seeking. I am a man much maligned. The public considers me a voluptuous sybarite, an erotic glutton. The reverse is true. I am — why mince matters? — absolutely ascetic. I must remain so until my obsession is relieved. I am a man cursed. But you are not interested in my personal problems, since naturally they are not for publication."

"Nevertheless I am interested. Jheral Tinzy is the source of your obsession?"

"Precisely." Viole Falushe spoke in a measured voice. "She has blighted my life. She must expunge this blight. Is this not justice? To date she has proved unwilling, incapable."

"How could she remove the obsession?"

Viole Falushe stirred fretfully. "Are you so uninmaginative? We have delved into this enough."

"So Jheral Tinzy is yet alive?"

"Yes indeed."

"But I understood you to say that she was dead."

"Life, death: these are imprecise terms."

"Who then is Drusilla, the girl you left with Navarth? Is she Jheral Tinzy?"

"She is who she is. She made a dreadful mistake. She failed, and Navarth failed, for Navarth should have schooled her. She is frivolous and wanton; she trafficked with other men, and she must serve as Jheral Tinzy served, and thus it shall be, ever and ever, until finally there is expiation, until I can feel soothed and whole. By this time there is a terrible score to pay. Thirty years! Think of it!" Viole Falushe's voice vibrated and cracked. "Thirty years surrounded by beauty, and incapable of enjoying it! Thirty long years!"

"I would not presume to give you advice," said Gersen, somewhat drily.

"I need no advice, and naturally what I tell you is in confidence. You would be ungracious to publish it. I would be grieved and forced to demand satisfaction."

"What then may I publish?"

"Whatever you like, so long as I am not injured."

"What of the other events here? What goes on at the other end of the hall?"

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Viole Falushe considered him a moment. Gersen could sense but not see the smoulder in his eyes. But he spoke in a light voice: "This is the Palace of Love. I am interested in the subject, even fascinated, through the mechanism of sublimation. I have an elaborate program of research under way. I explore the emotion in artificial and arbitrary circumstances. I do not choose to discuss the matter any further at this time. Perhaps five years from now, or ten, I will publish a resume of my findings. They will provide fascinating insights."

"In regard to the photographs in the foyer — "

Viole Falushe jumped to his feet. "No more. We have talked too much. I find myself uneasy. You have provoked this, hence I have arranged a similar uneasiness for you, which will go far to soothe me. Thereafter: caution, discretion! Make the most of your time, because shortly you must return to Reality."

"What of you? You remain here?"

"No. I shall also leave the Palace. My work here is accomplished, and I have an important mission on Alphanor, which well may change all . . . . Be so good as to step into the hall. My friend Helaunce awaits you."

Helaunce, thought Gersen. This would be the white-eyed man. Slowly, with Viole Falushe watching him from the screen, Gersen turned, went to the door.

The white-eyed man waited in the hall. He carried an object something like a flail: a rod terminating in a set of cords. He appeared to carry no other weapon.

"Remove your clothes," said Helaunce. "You are to be chastised."

"Best that you confine your chastisement to words," said Gersen. "Revile me all you like; in the meantime let us return to the garden."

Helaunce smiled. "I have my orders. Be as difficult as you like; the orders must and will be carried out."

"Not by you," said Gersen. "You are too thick and too slow."

Helaunce flourished the flail; the cords made a sinister crackling sound. "Quick, or you will make us impatient, and the punishment will be commensurate."

Helaunce was hard and tough, Gersen noted, obviously a trained fighter, perhaps as well trained as himself. Helaunce was also thirty pounds heavier. If he had a weakness, it was not apparent. Gersen suddenly sat down in the hall, put his hands to his face, began to sob.

Helaunce stared in puzzlement. "Off with your clothes! Do not

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sit there!" He came forward, nudged Gersen with his foot. "Up."

Gersen jumped up with Helaunce's foot clamped to his chest. Helaunce hopped backward; Gersen gave the foot a cruel twist, applying torque to joints where muscles could interpose no protection. Helaunce cried out in agony, fell flat. Gersen wrested loose the flail, struck him across the shoulder. The cords hissed, crackled; Helaunce muttered.

"If you can walk," said Gersen, "be good enough to show me the way."

There was a step behind him: Gersen turned to glimpse a tall shape in black garments. Something splashed purple-white light into his brain; Gersen toppled, dazed.

There was half an hour of nightmare. Gersen slowly regained control of his faculties. He lay naked in the Garden, beside the white Palace wall. His clothes were stacked neatly beside him.

So much for that, thought Gersen. The project had failed — but not in disaster, for he still had his life.

Gersen dressed himself, smiling grimly. There had been an attempt to humiliate him. It had not succeeded. He had paid, but pain, like pleasure, had no duration. Pride was an entity more persistent.

Gersen leaned against the wall until his brain cleared. His nerves still throbbed to the terrible flail. There were no bruises, no lacerations: no more than a few red welts. Gersen was hungry. And here was humiliation indeed: he must eat Viole Falushe's food, walk through the pleasant garden that Viole Falushe's brain had conceived.

Gersen smiled again, even more wolfishly than before. He had known that his life might not be altogether graceful and easy.

The time was about dusk. The garden had never seemed more beautiful. Fireflies moved in the jasmine bushes; marble urns glowed against dark foliage as if exuding wan light of their own. A troupe of girls from one of the villages came capering past. Tonight they wore loose white pantaloons and carried yellow lanterns. Seeing Gersen they circled around him singing a gay song, the words of which Gersen could not comprehend. One approached, held her lantern to Gersen's face. "Why so strange, guest-man? Why so gray? Come frolic, come join us!"

"Thank you," said Gersen. "I fear tonight I would frolic very poorly indeed."

"Kiss me," coaxed the girl. "Am I not beautiful? Why are

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you so sad? Because you must leave, forever and ever, the Palace of Love? And we will remain, and always be young and always carry our lanterns through the night. Is this why you grieve?"

Gersen smiled. "Yes, I must return to a far world. And I am forlorn at the thought. But do not let me interfere with your joy."

The girl kissed his cheek. "Tonight is your last night, your last night at the Palace of Love! Tonight you must do all you have neglected so far; never will there be another time!"

The girls continued on their way, with Gersen looking after them. "Do all I have neglected? I wish I could . . . ." He went to a sunken terrace where guests sat dining. Navarth crouched alone over a bowl of goulash; Gersen joined him. An attendant wheeled forth a cart; Gersen, who had not eaten since morning, served himself.

Navarth finally spoke: "What's happened? You appear well used."

"I spent an afternoon with our host."

"Indeed. You spoke to him face to face?"

"Almost so."

"And you know then his identity? Mario? Ethuen? Tanzel?"

"I can't be sure."

Navarth grunted and bent once more to the goulash.

"Tonight is the last night," Gersen said presently.

"So they tell me. I will be glad to go. There is no poetry here. It is as I have always set forth. Joy comes of its own free will; it cannot be belabored. Look! A great palace, a magnificent garden with live nymphs and heroes. But where is the dreaming, the myth? Only simple-minded folk find joy here."

"Your friend Viole Falushe would be sorry to hear you say this."

"I cannot say less." Navarth turned Gersen a sudden sharp look. Did you ask for the girl?"

"'I did. I learned nothing."

Navarth closed his eyes. "I have become an old man, I am ineffectual. Henry Lucas, whatever your name, cannot you act?"

"Today I tried," said Gersen. "I was not made welcome."

The two sat in silence. Then Gersen asked, "When do we leave?"

"I know no more than you."

"We will do what we can."

XXVII

The last night at the Palace of Love was celebrated by a fete. There was music, intoxicating fumes, a whirl of dancers from the villages. Those who had formed attachments made woeful conversation or indulged in a

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final frenzy of passion. Others sat quietly, each in his private mood, and so passed the night. One by one the colored lights blinked and dimmed; the folk in white slipped away through the garden gloom; one by one the guests took themselves to their couches, alone or in the company that pleased them most.

The garden was quiet, and dew began to form on the grass. To each of the guests went a servant. "The time has come to leave."

To grumblings and protests the servants made but one reply: "These are our orders. The aircar waits; those who are not on hand must walk their way back to Kouhila."

The guests once more were provided new clothing: an austere costume of blue, black and dark green. They were then guided to an area somewhat south of the Palace where a large aircar waited. Gersen counted. All were here except Pruitt and Drusilla. Ethuen, Mario and Tanzel stood nearby. If one were Viole Falushe, it seemed that now he planned to return to the Oikumene with the others.

Gersen went forward, glanced into the pilot's compartment. Here sat Helaunce. The guests were filing into the aircar. Gersen took Navarth aside. "Wait."

"Why?"

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"No matter." Tanzel and Ethuen were aboard; now Mario climbed the ladder. Gersen spoke hurriedly. "Go aboard. Make a disturbance. Pound on the bulkhead. Shout. There is an emergency lock between the saloon and the pilot's compartment. Pull this open. Distract the pilot; try not to incite either Mario, Ethuen or Tanzel. They must not be encouraged to interfere."

Navarth looked at him blankly. "What is the use of this?"

"No matter, do as I say. Where is Drusilla? Where is Jheral Tinzy? Why are they not aboard?"

"Yes, why are they not aboard? I am truly outraged." Navarth jumped up the ladder, thrusting aside the Druidess Laidig. "Wait!' he called. "We are not all present. Where is Zan Zu from Eridu? We cannot leave without her. I refuse to leave; nothing will remove me."

"Quiet, old fool," growled Torrace daNossa. "You do no good."

Navarth raged back and forth. He struck on the forward bulkhead, pulled on the handle of the communicating door. Finally Helaunce opened the door, went aft to enforce order. "Old man, sit quietly. It is by order that we now leave. Unless you care to walk the long road, sit quiet."

"Come then, Navarth," said Lerand Wible. "You achieve nothing. Sit quietly."

"Very well," said Navarth. "I have protested. I have done all I can; I can do no more."

Helaunce returned forward. He backed into the pilot's compartment, closed the door. Gersen, waiting to the side, struck him over the head with a stone. Helaunce staggered, spun around. He saw Gersen through eyes blinded by blood and gave an inarticulate cry. Gersen struck again, and Helauce fell aside.

Gersen settled himself at the controls. Up rose the aircar, up into the light of the rising sun. Gersen searched Helaunce, found two projacs which he tucked into his own pocket. Slackening speed until the aircar only drifted, he slid open the door, rolled Helaunce out and away.

In the saloon, thought Gersen, Viole Falushe must be wondering as to the peculiar course Helaunce was steering. Gersen sought around the ocean and presently spied a small island some twenty miles from the shore. He circled it and seeing no sign of habitation landed the aircar.

He jumped to the ground. Going to the saloon port, he pulled it open, jumped inside. "Everybody out. Quick." And he gestured with the projacs.

Wible stuttered, "What does this mean?"

"It means every body out."

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Navarth jumped to his feet. "Come along," he bawled. "Everybody out."

The guests uncertainly filed outside. Mario came to the door. Gersen halted him. "You must remain. Be very careful and do not move, or I will kill you."

Tanzel came by, and Ethuen; both were intercepted, ordered to sit. Finally the saloon was empty but for Gersen, Mario, Tanzel and Ethuen. Outside Navarth excitedly harangued the group. "Make no interference or you will regret it! This is IPCC business; I know it for a fact!"

"Navarth!" Gersen called from the saloon. "Your assistance, please."

Navarth climbed back into the saloon. He searched Mario, Tanzel and Ethuen, while Gersen stood vigilantly by. No weapons, no clues to the identity of Viole Falushe were discovered. To Gersen's direction, Navarth tied the three men to chairs using various oddments of cord, strips of fabric and thongs. Meanwhile the three excoriated Gersen and demanded the basis for his persecution. Tanzel was the most verbose, Ethuen the most acrimonious, Mario the most enraged. All glared and cursed with equal vigor. Gersen accepted the remarks with equanimity. "I will apologize to two of you later. Those two, aware of their innocence, will cooperate with me. From the third man I expect trouble. I am prepared for it."

Tanzel asked, "In Jehu's name, then: what do you wish of us? Name your third man and have done!"

"Vogel Filschner is his name," said Gersen. "Otherwise known as Viole Falushe."

"Why pick on us? Go seek him at the Palace!"

Gersen grinned. "Not a bad idea." He tested the bonds of the three men, tightened here, reknotted there. "Navarth, you sit here, to the side. Watch these three carefully. One of them took Jheral Tinzy from you."

"Tell me which one."

"Vogel Filschner. You don't recognize him?"

"I wish I could." He pointed to Mario. "This one has his shifty eye." He indicated Tanzel's hands. "This one has a mannerism I remember in Vogel." He turned to inspect Ethuen. "And this one has a store of spite and clearly is unhappy."

"Certainly I'm unhappy!" snapped Ethuen. "Why should I rejoice?"

"Watch them well," said Gersen. "We return to the Palace."

Ignoring the outcries of the marooned guests, he took the aircar aloft. So far so good — but what next? Conceivably his rea-

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soning was awry; conceivably neither Tanzel, nor Mario, nor Ethuen was Viole Falushe. Thinking back over the circumstances of the journey to the Palace, he discarded the notion.

The best method of ingress to the apartments of Viole Falushe was from above; Gersen had no stomach for another climb around the cliff. He landed the aircar beside the stone castle and went back into the saloon. All was as before. Navarth sat glaring at the three captives, who regarded him with loathing.

Gersen gave Navarth one of the projacs. "If there is difficulty kill all three. I go to look for Drusilla and Jheral Tinzy. You must guard with care!"

Navarth laughed wildly. "Who can trick a mad poet? I know him this instant; I intend to keep the weapon at his throat."

Gersen could not restrain a sense of misgiving. Navarth was not the most stable of guardians. "Remember! If he escapes, we are lost. He may want a glass of water; let him thirst. His bonds may be too tight. He must suffer! Show no mercy if there is interference from outside. Shoot all three."

"With pleasure."

"Very well. Keep your madness in check till I return!"

Gersen went to the door through which three weeks previously the sodden band of pilgrims had entered. The door was locked; he blasted away the hardware and entered.

There was no sound. The dank rooms were empty. Gersen went down the hall, descended by the way the girl in blue velvet had taken him and finally found the banquet room, now dim, smelling faintly of perfume and wine.

Gersen moved more cautiously. From the banquet room a way led down to the garden. Another must lead to Viole Falushe's apartments.

Gersen checked the walls and finally, behind a hanging, found a narrow door of heavy wood barred with metal. Once again he burnt his way through.

A spiral staircase led down into the chamber to the back of the circular foyer.

Gersen searched the room. He found a black leather notebook containing exhaustive notes upon the psychology of Jheral Tinzy, and the various methods by which Viole Falushe hoped to win her. It seemed that Viole Falushe wanted more than love: he wanted submission, abject quivering absement, derived from a mingling of love and fear.

So far, reflected Gersen, Viole Falushe had fallen short in his goal. He tossed the portfolio aside. On the wall was a tele-

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screen. Gersen turned a knob. Drusilla Wayles wearing a white robe sat on a bed. She was pale, thin, but apparently unharmed.

Gersen turned the knob. He looked out upon a gloomy area of sand among tall rock pinnacles. To the back were five dark deodors and a little cabin hardly larger than a dollhouse. Sitting on a bench was a girl about fourteen years old, a girl almost identical to Drusilla. She wore a transparent white gown; her face had a peculiarly sweet, peculiarly pensive expression, as if she had only just awakened from a pleasant dream. From the side came a tall nonhuman creature, walking on thin black furred legs. It stopped beside the girl, spoke in a thin high-pitched voice. The girl responded without interest.

Gersen turned the knob again, to bring into view a terrace in front of what appeared to be a temple. Inside could be glimpsed the statue of a divinity. On the steps stood another Drusilla, this one sixteen years old, wearing only a kirtle and a copper fillet to confine her hair. Elsewhere were other men and women, similarly dressed. To the side was the suggestion of a shore, with water beyond.

Gersen turned the knob again, again, again. He looked into various environments, various types of rooms and cages. They contained an assortment of boys, girls, youths, maidens, young men and women, sometimes separate, sometimes together. Here were Viole Falushe's experiments, from which he evidently extracted a voyeur's pleasure. But Gersen saw no more versions of Drusilla.

Urgency prickled at his nerves, stemming from his lack of faith in Navarth; he set off along the hall and crossing the bridge, entered the laboratory section to the west. Here was the locale of the experiments, in cages and chambers behind one-way mirrors.

Gersen found Retz, the stoop-shouldered technician, sitting in a small office. He looked up startled at the sight of Gersen. "What do you do here? Are you a guest? The master will be displeased!"

"I am master now." Gersen displayed the projac. "Where is the girl who resembles Jheral Tinzy?"

Retz blinked, half-defiant, half-doubtful. "I can tell you nothing."

Gersen struck him with the gun. "Quick. The girl who came here three weeks ago."

Retz began to whine. "What can I tell you? Viole Falushe will punish me."

"Viole Falushe is a prisoner." Gersen leveled the gun. "Take me to the girl, or I will kill you."

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Retz made a despairing sound. "He will do terrible things to me."

"No longer."

Retz waved his arms, walked down the corridor. Suddenly he stopped, turned around. "You say he is your prisoner?"

"He is."

"What do you plan to do with him?"

"Kill him."

"And what of the Palace?"

"We shall see. Take me to the girl."

"Will you leave me here, in charge of the Palace?"

"I will kill you unless you make haste."

Disconsolately Retz moved on. Gersen spoke to him. "What has Viole Falushe done to her?"

"Nothing yet."

"What did he plan?"

"An autofertlization: a virgin birth, so to speak. In due course she would bear a female child precisely like herself."

"Jheral Tinzy gave birth to her in this way?"

"Exactly."

"And how many others?"

"Six others. Then she killed herself."

"Where are the other five?"

"Ah! As to that I can't say."

Retz was lying, but Gersen allowed the statement to go unchallenged.

Retz paused by a door, looked craftily over his shoulder. "The girl is within. Whatever she reports, you must remember that I am only an underling; I only obey orders."

"Then you'll obey mine. Open the door." Retz hesitated a final instant, with a glance over Gersen's shoulder down the hall, as if hoping against hope for succor. He sighed, slid back the door. Drusilla, sitting on the bed, looked up with alarm. She saw Gersen; her expression changed from astonishment to joy. She jumped up from the bed, ran to Gersen, sobbed in relief. "I hoped you'd come. They've done such dreadful things to me!'

Retz, thinking to take advantage of Gersen's distraction, started to slink away. Gersen called him back. "Not so fast. I have use for you." He spoke to Drusilla. "Has Viole Falushe shown himself to you? Will you recognize him?"

"He came to stand in the doorway with the light at his back. He did not want me to see him. He was savage, he hated me. He said I had been faithless. I asked how this was possible since I had promised him nothing. He became absolutely cold. He said that it had been my duty to wait, to maintain my ideals, until he had come. And even then, he said, I had played him false, at Navarth's party and on the trip."

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Gersen said, "One thing is certain then: he is Tanzel or Ethuen or Mario. Which did you like the least?"

"Tanzel."

"Tanzel, eh? Well, Retz here will show us certainly which is Viole Falushe, will you not, Retz?"

"How can I? He has never shown himself to me, except behind the glass of his office."

Unlikely, thought Gersen. Still, not impossible. "Where are the other daughters of Jheral Tinzy?"

"Six there were," muttered Retz. "Viole Falushe killed the two oldest. There is one on Alphanor. This one — " he indicated Drusilla " — was sent to Earth. The youngest is to the east of the Palace, where the mountains meet the sea. The next is priestess to the god Arodin, on the large island directly to the east."

"Retz," said Gersen, "I hold Viole Falushe a captive. I am your new master. Do you understand this?"

Retz nodded sulkily. "If this is how it must be."

"Can you identify Viole Falushe?"

"He is a tall man. He has dark hair. He can be harsh or soft; cruel or easy. Beyond that I do not know."

"These are my orders to you. Liberate these poor captives."

"Impossible!" fluted Retz. "They know no other life than their peculiar environments. The open air, the sun, the sky — they would go mad!"

"This is your task then. As gently and easily as possible, bring them forth. I will return shortly and see how well you have done your job. Further, make known to the folk in the garden that they are no longer slaves, that they are free to go or stay. Mind you, I will pen you in a closet and punish you for your crimes if you do not obey me."

"I will obey," muttered Retz. "I am accustomed to obedience; I know nothing else."

Gersen took Drusilla by the arm. "I worry about Navarth. We dare not be gone too long."

XXVIII

But when they returned up through the castle and out to the aircar, circumstances were as before. The three captives were secure, and Navarth held the weapon unblinkingly at their heads. His eyes glowed at the sight of Drusilla. "What of Jheral Tinzy?"

"She is dead. But she had daughters. There are others. What has transpired while I was gone?"

"Talk. Blandishments. Persuasion. Threats."

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"Of course. Who was most insistent?"

"Tanzel."

Gersen turned Tanzel a cool inspection. Tanzel shrugged. "Do you think I enjoy sitting here trussed like a chicken?"

"One of you is Viole Falushe," said Gersen. "Which? I wonder. . . . Well, we must undo more of the dreadful mischief performed in the name of love."

He took the aircar aloft, cruised slowly east over the mountains. At the ocean's edge, where the crags submerged into the water, a gloomy defile opened upon a narrow gray beach. Behind was a sandy open area perhaps an acre in extent. Gersen lowered the aircar into the shadows and landed. He jumped out. Drusilla IV, the youngest of the group, came slowly forward. From a fissure to the back, two nonhuman nurse-maids made angry chattering sounds. The girl asked, "Are you The Man? The Man who is to love me?"

Gersen grinned. "I am a man, true enough. There are many men in the world. Who is 'The Man?' "

Drusilla IV looked vaguely toward the fissure. "They have told me of The Man. There is one of me and one of him, and when I see him I must love him. This is what I have learned."

"But you have never seen this 'man?' "

"No. You are the first 'man' I have ever seen. The first person like myself. You are wonderful!"

"There are many men in the world," said Gersen. "They told you a falsehood. Come aboard, I will show you other men and a girl like yourself."

Drusilla IV looked around the dreary defile in alarm and bewilderment. "Will you take me from here? I am frightened."

"You need not be," said Gersen. "Come aboard now."

"Of course." She took his hand trustingly and entered the saloon. At the sight of the passengers she halted in astonishment. "I never knew so many people existed!" She examined Mario, Ethuen and Tanzel critically. "I don't like them. They have foolish wicked faces." She turned to Gersen. "I like you. You are the first man I have ever seen. You must be The Man, and I will stay with you forever."

Gersen watched the faces of Mario, Ethuen, Tanzel. This must make poor hearing for Viole Falushe. All sat stony-faced, glaring at Gersen with equal degrees of detestation. Except, at the corner of Tanzel's mouth, a tiny muscle twitched.

Gersen took the aircar aloft and flew out toward the largest of the islands and almost immediately spied the temple looming

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above a village of cane and frond. Gersen landed the aircar in the square, while villagers watched in amazement and alarm.

From the temple sauntered Drusilla III, a girl confident and self-possessed, exactly identical to the other Drusillas, yet in some sense different, as the other two were different.

Once more Gersen alighted from the air-car. Drusilla III inspected him with candid interest. "Who are you?"

"I come from the mainland," said Gersen. "I come to speak to you."

"You want a rite performed? Go elsewhere. Arodin is impotent. I have beseeched him to send me elsewhere, among other boons. There is no response."

Gersen looked into the temple. "That is his likeness within?"

"Yes. I am priestess to the cult."

"Let us go look at the image."

"There is nothing to see: a status sitting on a thorne."

Gersen went into the temple. At the far end sat a figure twice as large as life. The head was rudely defaced: nose, ears, chin broken away. Gersen turned to Drusilla III in wonder. "Who damaged the statue?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"I did not like his face. According to the Rote, Arodin must come in the flesh to take me for his bride. I am enjoined to pray to the statue for the earliest nuptials possible. I broke the face, to delay the process. I do not like being a priestess, but I am allowed to be nothing else. I hoped that after I defiled the image another priestess might be appointed. This has not occurred. Will you take me away?"

"Yes. Arodin is no god, he is a man." Gersen took Drusilla III into the saloon, pointed out Mario, Ethuen, Tanzel. "Observe the three men. Does one of them resemble the statue of Arodin, before you defaced it?"

One of the men blinked.

"Yes," said Drusilla III "Yes indeed. There is the face of Arodin." She pointed to Tanzel, the man who had blinked.

Tanzel cried out, "Here, here! What's going on? What are you trying to do?"

"I want to identify Viole Falushe," said Gersen.

"Why pick on me? I'm not Arodin, nor Viole Falushe, nor yet Beelzebub, for that matter. I'm good old Harry Tanzel of London, no more, no less, and I'll thank you to take these ropes from my arms."

"In due course," said Gersen. He turned to Drusilla III. "You're sure that he is Arodin?"

"Of course. Why is he tied?"

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"I suspect him of being a criminal."

Drusilla III laughed, a clear merry sound. "What a dreadful joke! A man like that putting up a statue to himself and calling himself a god! What did he hope to gain?"

"You."

"Me? All this effort for me?"

"He wanted you to love him, to worship him."

Again Drusilla III's laughter rang through the ship. "A great deal of wasted effort."

And Gersen, watching closely, thought to see a pink flush seep across Tanzel's face. "You are ready to leave here?"

"Yes. Who are these other girls, who so resemble me?"

"Your sisters."

"How strange."

"Yes. Viole Falushe — or Arodin, if you refer — is a strange man."

Gersen took the air-car aloft, set it to cruising slowly on the automatic pilot while he cogitated. Still no absolute proof to the identity of Viole Falushe. A twitch of the mouth, a seep of color, a defaced countenance. Interesting, but hardly incontrovertible evidence. Essentially he was no closer to the identity of Viole Falushe than when he set out on the journey.

He looked back into the saloon. The three girls were holding a somewhat guarded conversation. Navarth had become bored with his duties and was watching the girls with a half-expectant, half-forlorn expression: perhaps by some miracle they would merge to become his own precious Jheral Tinzy.

Gersen sifted his courses of action. They were few. If he had access to one or another of the truth drugs, Viole Falushe's identity would emerge swiftly enough. There was no one at the Palace of Love who could recognize Viole Falushe, probably no one at the cities Atar or Kouhila. On Earth Navarth knew Viole Falushe's call-code . . . . Gersen rubbed his chin. "Navarth!"

Navarth came into the pilot's compartment. Gersen indicated the communication system, gave instructions. Navarth grinned ear to ear.

Gersen went back to the saloon, seated himself near Tanzel. He looked through into the pilot's compartment, nodded to Navarth.

Navarth tapped Viole Falushe's call-code. Gersen bent forward. At the lobe of Tanzel's ear sounded a faint whir, an almost imperceptible vibration. Tanzel jerked, strained at his bonds.

Navarth spoke softly into the forward microphone. "Viole Falushe. Can you hear me? Viole Falushe!"

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"Then what?" growled Ethuen. "How are we to find our way back to Sogdian? We have no spaceship."

Gersen laughed. "Were you deceived? This is Sogdian. That is the sun Miel. How could you not notice?"

"Why should I? A lunatic pilot careened through the cluster for hours."

"A subterfuge. Zog was no lunatic. But he was careless; he performed no acclimatization routine; when he flung open the port there was no difference in pressure or composition. The light was the same intensity; the gravity was the same, the sky was the same color, the clouds the same shape, the flora of the same type."

"I noticed nothing," said Navarth. "But I am no space-traveler. I feel no shame. If I ever return to Earth, I shall never depart again."

"First: a stop at the city Kouhila. The folk will be pleased to learn that they need pay no further taxes."

XXIX

At Atar Gersen found the Distis Pharaon as he had left it. Mario, Wible and daNossa had spaceboats of their own; the other guests were conveyed back to the Oikumene by the ship which Viole Falushe had ordered for their use. Navarth and the three Drusillas came aboard the Pharaon. Gersen flew them to New Wexford and put them aboard the packet for Earth. "I will send you money," he told Navarth. "It will be for the girls. You must make sure that they are raised properly."

"I have done my best with Zan Zu," said Navarth gruffly. "She is raised. What is amiss with her? The others will need more care."

"Exactly. And when I am next on Earth I will see you."

"Good. We will sit on the deck of my houseboat and drink my fine wine." Navarth turned away. Gersen took a deep breath, went to say good-by to Drusilla Wayles.

She came close to him, took his hands. "Why can't I come with you? Wherever you go."

"I can't explain to you. But — no. Not now. I tried it once, to no avail."

"I would be different."

"I know you are. But there might be worse problems. I might not be able to part with you ever again."

"Will I ever see you again?"

"I don't think so."

Drusilla turned away. "Good-by," she said listessly.

Gersen took a step after her, halted, then swung around and went his way.

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Tanzel jerked around, to meet Gersen's appraising stare. There could be no more dissembling; Viole Falushe was unmasked. A look of desperation came over his face; he writhed against his bonds.

"Viole Falushe," said Gersen. "The time has come."

"Who are you?" gasped Viole Falushe. "IPCC?"

Gersen made no answer Navarth came back.

"So this is he. I knew it all the time. He inflicted me with chill. Where is Jheral Tinzy, Vogel?"

Viole Falushe licked his lips. "You two have plotted to kill me."

Gersen and Navarth carried him forward, into the pilot's compartment, closed the door communicating with the saloon.

"Why?" cried Viole Falushe. "Why must you do this to me?"

Navarth turned to Gersen. "Do you need me?"

"No."

"Good-by, Vogel," said Navarth. "You have lived a remarkable life." He went back into the saloon.

Gersen slowed the air-car to a hover. He opened the port. Ten thousand feet below spread the ocean.

"Why? Why? Why?" cried Viole Falushe. "Why do you do this to me?"

Gersen spoke in a dry voice. "You are a monomaniac. I am the same. When I was a child the five Demon Princes brought their ships to Mount Pleasant. Do you recall?"

"Long ago, so long ago!"

"They destroyed, they killed, they enslaved. Everything I loved — family, friends, all destroyed. The Demon Princes are my obsession. I have killed two of them. You will be the third. I am not Henry Lucas the journalist. I am Kirth Gersen, and all my life is aimed toward — this."

He stepped toward Viole Falushe, who made a terrible wrenching exertion. His bonds snapped; he lurched, flung out his arms and toppled back and out the port. Gersen watched the long figure drifting down toward the ocean until it passed from sight. Then he closed the port, returned to the saloon. Navarth had already released Mario and Ethuen.

"My apologies to you," said Gersen. "I hope you have not been seriously injured."

Ethuen gave him a look of unspeakable dislike; Mario made a muttering sound in his throat.

"Well, then," said Navarth cheerfully. "What now?"

"We will pick up our friends," said Gersen. "No doubt they are wondering what is to become of them."

Gersen chartered a freight carrier and took it to the Palace of Love. The gardens seemed wild, less well tended. An indefinable gloom had come over the airy structures.

Retz greeted him with cautious cordiality. "I have been doing your bidding. Slowly, easily, not to disturb or alarm."

He took Gersen on a tour of the special environments; he described the weird and intricate thought-patterns Viole Falushe had imposed upon his young victims. One by one the victims were emerging into the upper air, some astonished, some delighted, some dazzle and frightened.

Gersen could not leave Viole Falushe's books to moulder. He loaded them aboard the freighter and consigned them to the care of Jehan Addels at New Wexford. With a final admonition for Retz, Gersen himself departed and flew off through the stars of Sirneste Cluster, back toward the Oikumene.

Months later, sitting on the Esplanade at Avente, on Alphanor, Gersen saw a young woman approaching. She wore fashionable garments in the best of taste, she obviously had been raised in an atmosphere of gentility and good manners.

On a sudden impulse Gersen stepped forward. "Please excuse me," he said, "but you resemble someone I know on Earth. Are your parents Earth-folk?"

The girl listened without embarrassment. She shook her head. "This may seem strange, but I do not know my parents. I may be an orphan, or — " she made a rueful little grimace — " something else. My guardians receive money to provide a home for me. Do you know my parents?"

Gersen thought, what in the world am I up to? Why disturb the girl with the details of her background, or worse, the nightmare she had no narrowly avoided. For here, certainly, was Viole Falushe's business on Alphanor.

Gersen pretended doubt. "I'm mistaken — I think. The resemblance must be a coincidence. You could not possibly be the person I thought you to be."

"I don't believe you," said Drusilla I. "You know but you won't tell. I wonder why not?"

Gersen grinned. The girl was immensely appealing, with a thousand charms and graces. "Sit here on the bench a moment. I'll read you a ballad or two from the works of the mad poet Navarth. When he wrote them he was perhaps thinking of you."

Drusilla I seated herself. "An unconventional way to start a acquaintance. But I'm an unconventional person. Well, read the poetry." — JACK VANCE

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Galaxy Bookshelf

By Algis Budrys

A loop, a bank, a vertical climb, and once again you know it's time for the Annual Galaxy Bookshelf Awards. This institution, whose prestige has caught on like wildfire throughout the science-fiction milieu, is still — as the First Annual Galaxy Bookshelf Awards were last year — simply a statement that the following literary creations and creators have managed to impress me considerably. And the award still consists of one heartfelt oath of envy, collectible at the earliest opportunity, and is I suppose convertible into drink, though I have days when the fortunate recipient may have to do the buying.

The best novel of the year was Daniel Keyes's *Flowers For Algernon,* published by Harcourt, Brace & World.

It was a bad year for short stories; I did not find a one in any sort of book publication that really sang. David I. Masson's *Travelers' Rest* came closest. It appeared in Ace Books' Second Annual *World's Best Science Fiction,* and I will give it a grunt of appreciation, but reserve the oath.

The most interesting "new" writer is Roger Zelazny. There are stretches of time when I wish I were he. Or maybe that he were me.

There is no award for a collection or anthology, either. I think the growing availability of book

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Amazing. Yet from these four stories he has been able to build a consistent declaration about the nature of man and society. Furthermore, what he has to say is quite cogent and certainly will be popular among the increasing number of readers who are increasingly concerned about the immediate future of Man. It may be possible to maintain that science fiction is finally arriving at the place that Leiber made for himself long ago.

I don't want you to think that these are all necessarily good stories considered as stories, though Leiber is a very good writer. Aside from having all the prose tools, he has, as you know, a gift for poetry, for the creation of images which endure — in one case, in my own mind, over the twenty-two years since I first encountered the bridges to nowhere in *Sanity,* which in this book is republished as *Crazy Wolf.* In fact, his gift for capturing the perversity and the irony of the human situation, and what people do with it, is all by itself one good reason why it is hard to stop reading a Leiber story.

Nevertheless, there are times when only faith that the next nugget will soon arrive keeps you reading, because another thing Leiber discovered at some point was that he was not being paid enough by the word.

The Lone Wolf (originally *The Creature from Cleveland Depths* in *Galaxy*) is the lead story in this collection and bounces along quite nicely. Through the medium of Gusterson, the hugely alive, idea-spouting renegade who stays on the surface when the rest of humanity moles down into blast-proof cities, Leiber does a nice job of contrasting individualistic sanity with the self-destructive, socially safe inward spiral the world may be said to be on at the moment.

But this is followed by *The Wolf Pair,* (originally *The Night of the Long Knives*), which is surely much too long and terribly uneventful. Between an engaging beginning as a man and woman stalk each other in radioactive wastelands, and a couple of intermediate minutes of contact with the beleaguered but brilliant civilization of Atlantic Highlands, it glaciates on through word after accountable word of conversation about the unfortunate nature of man. It isn't that Leiber is saying something wrong, or that what he is saying is dull. It is how he says it that drags and drags, and this may put you off some since it is the longest story in the book.

But then you encounter *Crazy Wolf,* and in this short, essentially slight story whose burden is

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publication, and the increasing pressure to do books, and think in terms of books, is having a bad effect on the shorter fiction, and newer writers, in this field.

The best publishing idea of the year was World's issuance of Sam Moskowitz's book-end *Seekers of Tomorrow* and *Modern Masterpieces of Science Fiction.* Since giving *Seekers of Tomorrow* what I consider to have been a generally good review, I have heard from one of the writers biographied-upon therein. His comments on Moskowitz's sketch of his motivations as a writer, and of his motivations, period, were terse and moving. I feel duty-bound to report this to you. Nevertheless, it *was* a good idea.

In the past year, as you know, I've told you a couple of glaringly stupid things. One of them occurred in my review of John Brunner's *The Squares of the City,* in which I exactly reversed Blish's Complaint. What Jim actually said was that if you are going to write a story parallelling a chess game, you are obliged to create the game, too, rather than use an existing one as your model for the plot. I am not sure I agree, but in any event I butchered this reference in discussing Brunner's book. I have not, of course, changed my overall lack of impression in the slightest, despite the fact that the New York *Times* chess writer gave it a good book review.

I have the impression of a couple of other stupidities, but I forget them now. Let us in any event hurry on; if we do not, I will yield to the temptation to begin awarding booby prizes to others besides myself.

Fritz Leiber is one of science fiction's lonely men. Living much of his writing life in such a hinterland as Chicago, for God's sake, and never quite falling in exclusively with some one magazine market or some one editor that might create an identifiable Fritz Leiber place in the microcosm, he goes his own way, and to all discernible intents always says what he thinks.

What he thinks is often just a little to one side or another of whatever focus science fiction may be fixed on at the moment. *The Night of the Wolf* (Ballantine) is therefore an extremely interesting collection on purely forensic grounds. This fairly long book contains but four stories, a touch but not intrinsically modernized. Their copyright dates are 1962, 1960, 1944 and 1950, and their original places of publication are as markedly different from each other as *Galaxy,* the old New York *Amazing,* the old *Astounding,* and the Chicago pulp

that in a society of gentle lunatics it's the aggressive sane man who's coo-coo, there is writing which, as I've testified, one does not want to forget.

The final story is *The Wolf Pack,* which ran as *Let Freedom Ring* during one of the many periods in *Amazing*'s life when it was sliding quickly downhill and was about to be completely revamped.

This is the story of a society in which humanity has at last learned not to fight. What it has learned to do instead is regiment its members so thoroughly that they will accept a "moral equivalent of war" — the manufacture, stockpiling and ritual destruction of all the material necessary to support a major war, and the concurrent ritual death of five per cent of the population chosen by lot. The story is told mostly about Normsi, a young man who is one of the lucky five per cent and who refuses to swallow the propaganda which will make him proud of his honored duties to society.

This collection does hold together, does make a point and is the work of a consistent and talented thinker, of a professional. And of a thought-out world-view which clearly must exist in the writer's mind for something other than story purposes. I guess the thing to say about *The Night of the Wolf,* and its effectiveness as an attempt to make four widely separated stories tell a story of human progress, is that it is an intelligent book. They are scarce.

I'd never heard of John Lymington before, and the Doubleday ($3.95) edition of *Froomb!* tells me nothing about him, beyond the fact that he is the author of at least five previous books, and that this book was originally copyright 1964. I would assume the copyright was registered in England, for Lymington is clearly an English author in the great tradition of science-thriller writing.

The plot idea behind *Froomb!* (I'll explain the title in a minute) is that Heaven occurs in the future. Lymington has apparently read *Experiment With Time,* and from it has his characters assert that in science's best guess, time moves in belts of various speeds; not only that people have died and been brought back to life but that in these cases they have always been dead for a period of exactly twenty-four hours; that Heaven or the afterlife or something does exist and that it is attainable by either time-travel or matter transmission.

These calm, matter-of-fact statements are well within the rules of English thriller writing,

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in which the author is allowed to take wild liberties with the truth on which he bases the remainder of his story. But it is very rare that a writer, once having placed this identification on his work, then goes on to write something else entirely, namely a book at which "science" plays the role assigned to industrial technology in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*.

"Froomb" is an acronym based, the author says, on a famous cartoon published first in *The Detroit Messenger*, and later in all countries, depicting the world at the wheel of a motor car, rushing at great speed down a slope to the final abyss, crying, "The Fluid's Running Out Of My Brakes!"

I don't believe in that cartoon. It certainly doesn't sound like something that would sweep the world and give rise to a popular catchphrase. Furthermore, brakes don't have fluid in them. Most kinds of automobile brakes are fluid pressure-actuated, true. They could just as easily be mechanical, compressed air or electromagnetic-operated without being changed in their essential nature, which as a matter of fact had better be as dry as possible. I bring up this little mechanical digression the sake of a pair of hypotheses, take your pick. (One) Perhaps the world is confused, and the author knows it. (Two) Perhaps a half-educated part of the world is confused, and the author, being a member of that set, is also confused.

I vote for Proposition Two. Lymington's intellectual thesis — no, Lymington's assumption — is that "science" in managing the world of the immediate future will run increasingly into side effects, and as a subheading under this is the assumption that side effects are always catastrophic. In Lymington's view of his scientist hero, David Packard, who is Britain's Minister for Science, there is no difference between the chemism that concerns itself with insect sprays and the science that concerns itself with nuclear physics. (Lymington thinks cobalt is a nuclear explosive).

Now, this is a farrago, a pack of misassumptions and disunderstandings. If A. E. Van Vogt had written it, it would be simple to say, "My God, he's read another book!" But Lymington is an Englishman, and there's some majestic and enviable rule in England that says you don't become a commercial writer until you have learned how to handle prose. Even the shabbiest and most cliche-ridden story the English can produce is nevertheless written at a higher level of composition that you would expect to find

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in the equivalent story written here. (I generalize sweepingly, but I feel that I generalize accurately). Accordingly, this is an often exciting, interesting, literate book, full of nicely evoked scene-setting, believable dialogue (once you accept the fact that *none* of these people know what they're talking about), and a level of sophistication about social interactions that is simply not available in most routine books written in this country.

By American standards, it has the trappings of thoughtfulness and genuine meaning. That worries me.

Poul Anderson's *The Trouble Twisters* (Doubleday, $3.95) is a collection of three stories about David Falkayn, rising young man in the Polesotechnic League. The League, you will remember, is the social device used with such success by Nicholas van Rijn, and David is in fact an employee of van Rijn Solar Spice & Liquors Co. In this book, lovable Nick has retreated to the status of legend — he gets brief mention as David Falkayn hopes some particularly brilliant exploit will bring the young man's name to the grand old man's attention.

But what we have here is the van Rijn universe, and the van Rijn philosophy all over again. There are many races in the galaxy, with many of which Man may hold converse provided he can establish meaningful communication before somebody gets critically mad at him. Interstellar travel is cheap enough to make import-export a lucrative trade, and therefore there are also many opportunities for a merchant-adventurer to make commercial arrangements with alien races, provided he can establish enough common cultural ground before being knocked off for an interfering foreign devil.

If you will remember, glorious, garrulous, bibulous Nick van Rijn was always being haunted by some upright young man or the other who wanted to do the idealistic thing while Nick tried to chase a dollar. David Falkayn is that young man, except that he has gotten the message clear, and his idealism is based on a romantic notion about merchandising and the beneficial effects of buying cheap and selling dear.

This view of things took good hold on a reader when expressed by van Rijn because he was such an obvious pirate and such a blatant hypocrite that you naturally couldn't help liking him and approving of anything he did. Besides, you were safe in your chair reading a book, so the chances of your getting in his way professionally were small. Falkayn, on an-

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other hand, is a likeable young fellow, insecure about his place in the world, not too sure he's going to measure up to his ideal, yet brave and mentally quick. In the first story, *The Three-Cornered Wheel,* he is an apprentice, trapped away from his crippled ship on a planet where repair parts are available but cannot be transported to the vessel because the local religion forbids the vulgar use of circles in any artifact. The wheel, as you know, is a representation of a circle, and so David has the problem of finding some sort of wheel which is not a circle, to build a wagon.

Anderson is known to be a gifted writer of adventure fiction. The detail, the plotting, the pace and the characterizations in this story are all at least adequate, often far better than average, sometimes superb. The spaceship crew's attempt to grapple with the problems of the church, state, and intellectual establishment of the alien world are suspensefully told. But the story *is* called *The Three-Cornered Wheel* and after the first thousand words the overriding thought is: "*Now* is he going to think of it? *Now* is he?" This does distract in some measure from the reader's enjoyment.

The middle story is *A Sun Invisible,* in which the problem is the emergence of a hostile, spacefaring civilization of aliens, liberally sprinkled with unaccountable-for humans, who come from a solar system and a sun which cannot possibly exist, and busily set about kicking the Polesotechnic League out of an entire sector of the sky. Finally we have *The Trouble Twisters,* orginally published as *Trade Team,* in which Falkayn more or less commands a spaceship whose alien crew consists of an intelligent cat, an intelligent dinosaur and an intelligent computer. Once again he has a problem, once again he solves it, though he has to lean on the computer to some extent. As a demonstration that computers have personality too, the machine asks for a share of profits and beats everybody at poker.

Sometimes I think that Anderson thinks he missed his chance; that somewhere, somehow, good as he is and rewarding as he is, he personally did not get from science fiction all that he deserves, and that he has shrugged his shoulders. Certainly, I think he has to some extent been damned with the wrong kind of praise, and stood in the wrong shadows. But even in froth, he is so damn good — though not always in what calls attention to itself on paper — that we miss noticing what really bad things would have happened to these stories in the hands of lesser men.

—ALGIS BUDRYS

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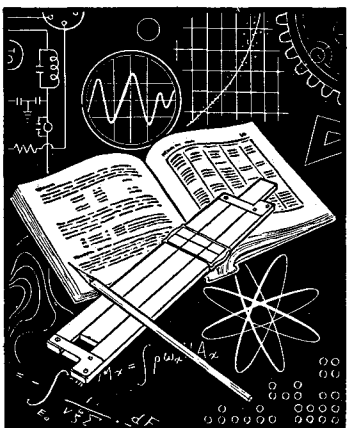

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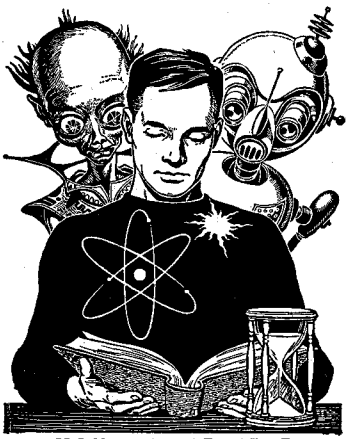

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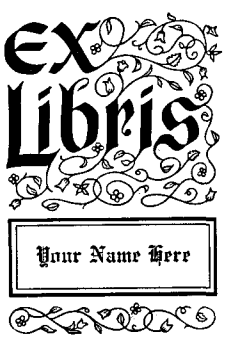

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